318 / NOVEMBER 1999

THE NI
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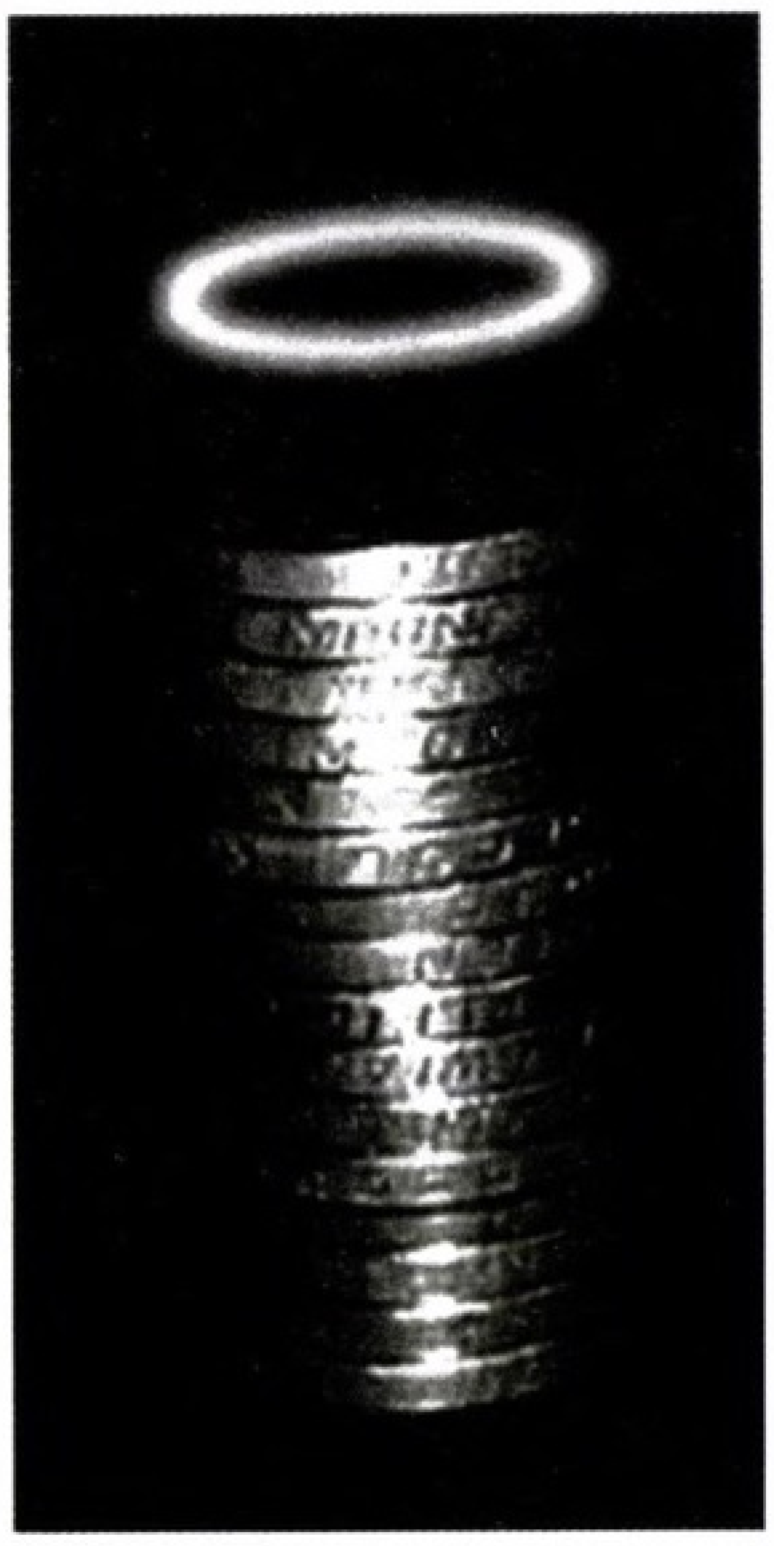

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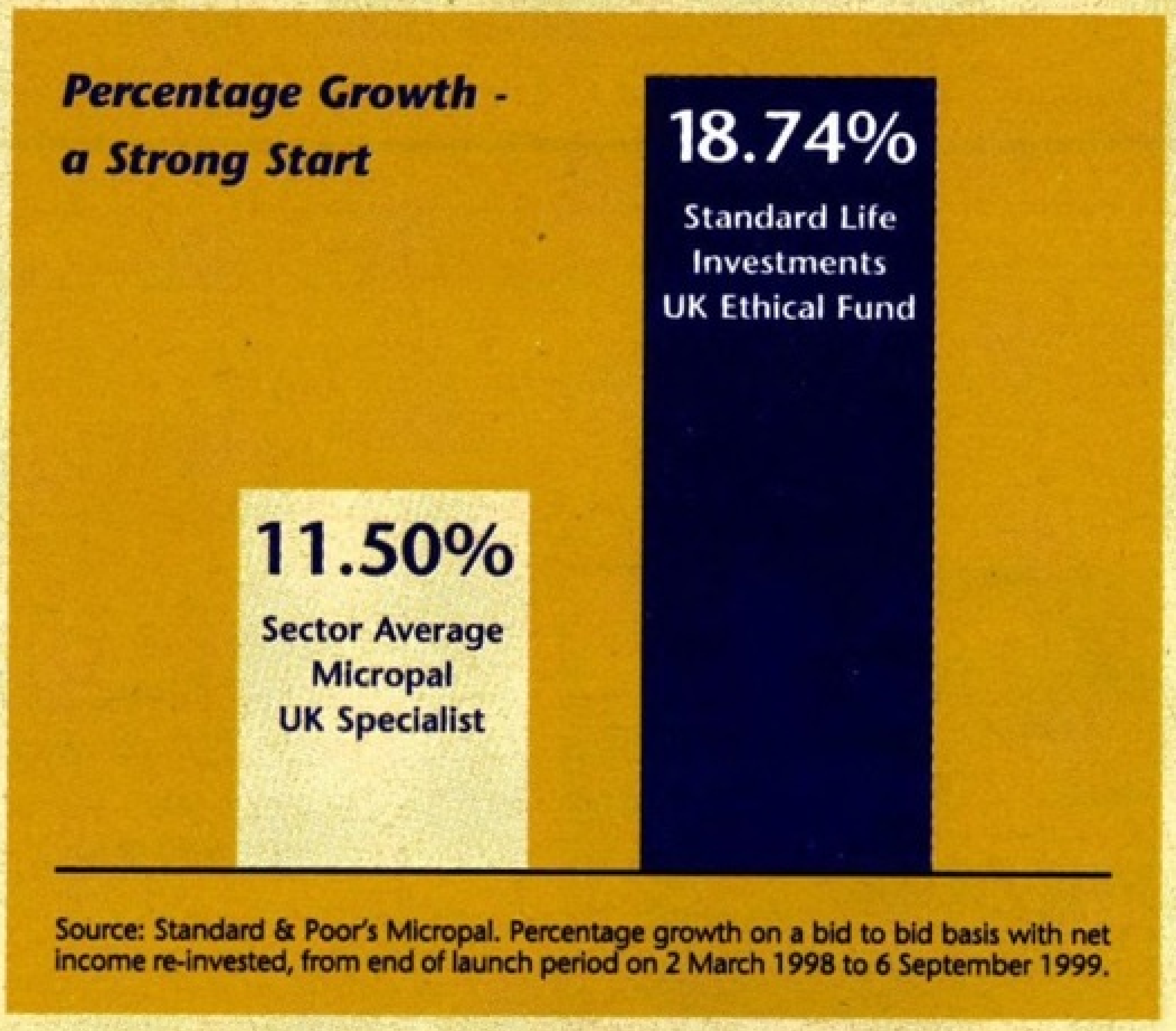

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: STUDENTS ON THE ROOF OF INDONESIA'S PARLIAMENT BY **DOMINIQUE CLARISSE / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES**.
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ALAN HUGHES**.

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Indonesia

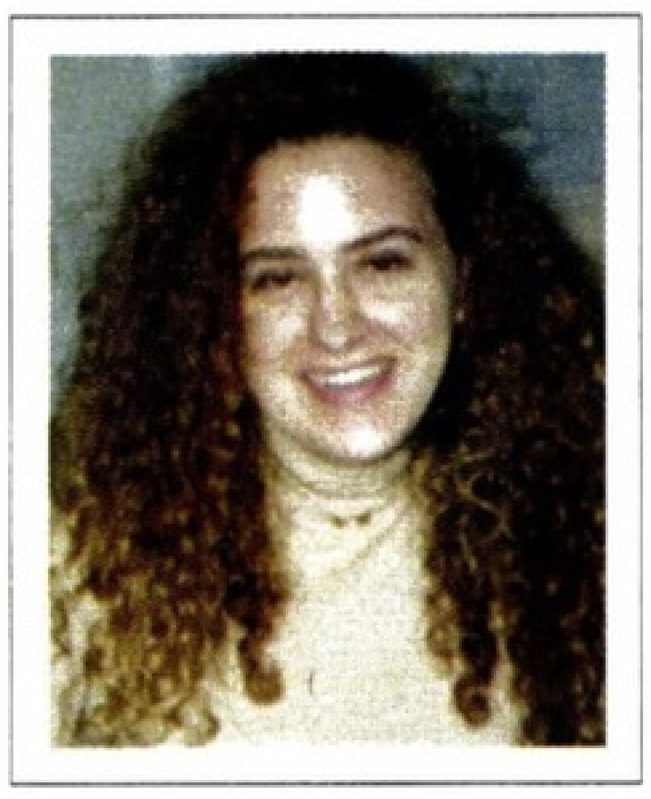
FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

Of all the magazines I have edited for *New Internationalist* so far, for me this issue – Indonesia – has brought out the most extreme emotions...

Optimism. Talking to activists in Indonesia, I got the impression that nothing is impossible. They have faced an oppressive military, a corrupt government and exploitative corporations and they have won remarkable victories. What's more amazing is that their defeats have not dulled the desire for change – the protests continue and the pressure they are exerting makes reform seem inevitable.

Terror. My visit to Aceh was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. In a place where you never know who is a spy and you know all too well who has the guns and the power, there is nowhere to turn and no-one to trust.

Awe. In the middle of this tense situation in Aceh, I became immensely excited on seeing an elephant out the car window. The taxi stopped and I walked through the jungle to find a baby elephant, only one-and-a half years old. Looking this elephant in the eye while its trunk sniffed and sucked at my skin is not an experience I'll forget. I was in a state of speechless awe for some time afterwards.



Hysterical laughter. Men in Indonesia often have very long fingernails. As I'd not really seen this before, I became a bit fixated about them. On a particularly boring taxi ride, I asked the driver why his nails were so long and why the thumbnail was shorter than the others. With great pride he told me the stories each of his fingernails, including (with moist eyes) the particularly tragic tale of how he broke this thumbnail. It was hilarious.

Frustration. I was unable to visit East Timor but instead watched developments from afar. Outrage summed up my usual response to news reports from the territory, commonly phrased in questions. Why was a deal made that gave the Indonesian military responsibility for security during the referendum? Why weren't peacekeepers brought in sooner? Why weren't the militias stopped?

In a way this myriad of emotions is a microcosm of Indonesia – the country is not only massive and diverse but is also undergoing fast and complex political change. I see the moves Indonesia has made towards reform – getting President Suharto to step down after 32 years, holding a free election, rallying tremendous popular support for democracy and peace. But I also see that Indonesia is still in the grip of a corrupt government and a powerful military. It's unreasonable to expect an immediate transition to democracy. As a Balinese man explained to a friend of mine: 'The Balinese believe each person has two sides of their brain: the good and the bad. Sometimes the good will be dominant and at other times the bad. But at all times you live with both sides.'

Anouk Ride
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

*Special thanks to **Jacqui Powell** for being such good company on my travels in Indonesia and providing all translations from Indonesian to English in this issue.*

Letters

Tragic topic

Iraq has for a long time been a most tragic topic for me and I have written letters to papers – many unpublished – and politicians. I am also trying to express my views to friends and neighbours, finding it extremely difficult to accept that most will either smile benevolently or simply tolerate me as an incorrigible fool.

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST
Iraq
What United Nations sanctions have done
◆ Cancer in the cradle of civilization
◆ Is Saddam the villain?
◆ Pride amidst the pain
◆ The US and Britain's bombing campaign

As a German-born I am well acquainted with the 'bombing strategies' of the Western Alliance. I find it cowardly and shameful. At the time, however, I took it on the nose, thinking that's the way it is. But then I was only five years old and didn't know any better. Since then I have become a close observer of world politics and I am appalled at the stranglehold the West exercises over the rest of the world.

I am also appalled at the destruction of a country which was the subject of some of my childhood's favourite fairy stories. A country with an ancient civilization. A proud and wonderful people. And the children. Why should they suffer just to satisfy the political appetite of the West?

Where is our superiority? Our humanity?

Elizabeth Allen
Stanford-le-Hope, England

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Rock solid

The September issue (**NI 316**) included a letter from Nestlé under the heading 'Nestlé correction' containing the allegation that when complaints are made about Nestlé's baby-food marketing 'often the product is not ours and is a locally manufactured item'. Nestlé referred to a picture-agency photo published in **NI 313** showing the company's Lactogen on a shelf in China alongside a local brand, but is that the extent of its case? We are rock-solid in our evidence against Nestlé, which is why we won our case against them before the Advertising Standards Authority.

Nestlé has just demonstrated how slick its PR is in attacking the credibility of its critics.

Mike Brady
Baby Milk Action, Cambridge, England

Mealy-mouthed

I was surprised to see the attack on the Results organisation by Sarah Blackstock ('Bandaid wagon'**NI 314**). The substance of her attack – although substance rather overstates the content – is that microcredit schemes are not always properly evaluated and are 'not all they're cracked up to be'. The rest is nothing but faintly sneering innuendo. As for the links with Monsanto, I am sure there would be many within the Results organization who would welcome your arguments. But you imply some special and conspiratorial relationship when in fact Results has succeeded in lobbying and involving many large corporations, heads of government, and heads of UN agencies and the World Bank in its attempt to move the microcredit idea on to a larger scale. No doubt you would have preferred the idea of credit for the poorest to remain restricted to a few villages in one country – which is surely where it would be without all the 'touting'?

No-one should claim that microcredit schemes are the answer to everything. But we are talking here about an idea that has reached out with practical support to many tens of millions of the world's poorest people in their efforts to overcome the worst of poverty.

Results are the only large, serious and effective citizens' group campaigning against world poverty in the world's richest and most powerful country. They have thousands of committed and idealistic volunteers across the US who are just the kind of people that the **NI** should be serving and informing rather than attacking in this casual and mealy-mouthed way.

Finally may I say that I am glad to know that the **NI** never has and never would use seductive oratorical skills to advance an argument it passionately believed in.

Peter Adamson
Wallingford, England

Meaty disagreement

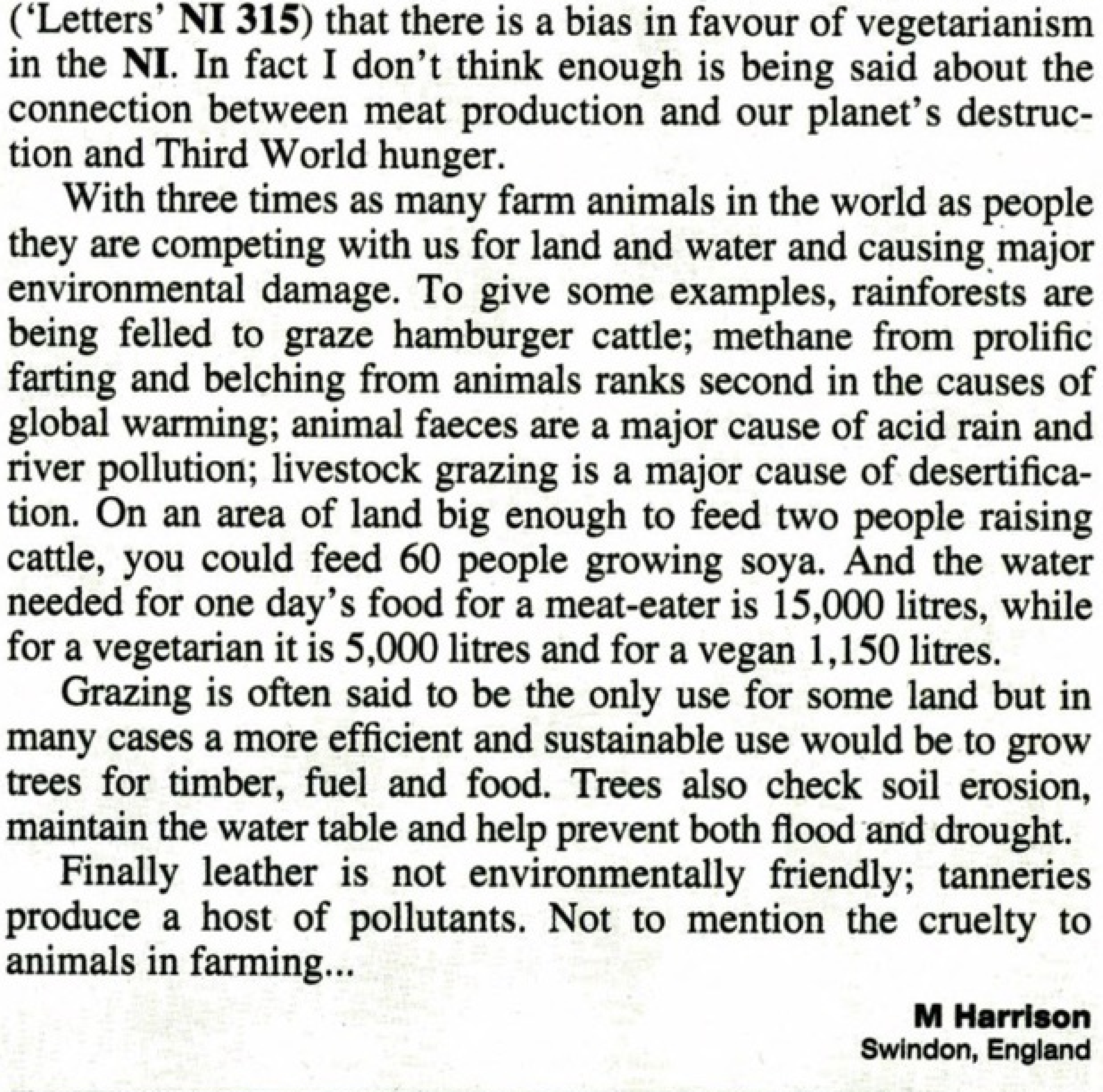
I totally disagree with my sausage-eating friend Anna Perceval ('Letters' **NI 315**) that there is a bias in favour of vegetarianism in the **NI**. In fact I don't think enough is being said about the connection between meat production and our planet's destruction and Third World hunger.

With three times as many farm animals in the world as people they are competing with us for land and water and causing major environmental damage. To give some examples, rainforests are being felled to graze hamburger cattle; methane from prolific farting and belching from animals ranks second in the causes of global warming; animal faeces are a major cause of acid rain and river pollution; livestock grazing is a major cause of desertification. On an area of land big enough to feed two people raising cattle, you could feed 60 people growing soya. And the water needed for one day's food for a meat-eater is 15,000 litres, while for a vegetarian it is 5,000 litres and for a vegan 1,150 litres.

Grazing is often said to be the only use for some land but in many cases a more efficient and sustainable use would be to grow trees for timber, fuel and food. Trees also check soil erosion, maintain the water table and help prevent both flood and drought.

Finally leather is not environmentally friendly; tanneries produce a host of pollutants. Not to mention the cruelty to animals in farming...

M Harrison
Swindon, England


Hot today, isn't it Dear?
I thought it was ME
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Straight record

The article 'Junkyard Dogs of Science' (**NI 314**) by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber promulgates ineffective communication on health and science issues.

The reference to my affiliation and research on Mad Cow Disease amounts only to a personal attack which ignores the evidence. My edited volume, *The Mad Cow Crisis: Health and the Public Good* (1998) includes various experts, academics, journalists and government officials who offer a balanced approach to the crisis, as opposed to the vociferous opinions of Rampton and Stauber's *Mad Cow USA*.

The *Lancet* review (15 August 1998) of my book con-cluded that it was an 'informative, stimulating and enjoyable book that should be of interest not only to the medical, political and journalistic world, but also to anyone who ever mused about the mad, the bad and the ugly side of a crisis that is far from over and could be repeated any time in the future in a different context'.

Scott C Ratzan
Washington DC , US

Building bridges

I'd like to thank the **NI** readers who helped raise the voice of sanity in Britain during the bombing of Yugoslavia and to let you know about a new organization, *Building Bridges to the People of Yugoslavia*. We will be campaigning for humanitarian aid for all the people of Yugoslavia and for Western governments to provide funds to assist with cleaning up the poisoned environment and the reconstruction of the civilian infrastructure of the whole country.

Far from preventing a humanitarian catastrophe, NATO bombardment created one. As the United Nations Inter-Agency Needs Assessment Mission recently reported, the air raids 'created a new type of complex humanitarian emergency'. The UN team said the raids had a 'devastating impact' on the environment, industry, employment, essential services and agriculture.

Many innocent civilians, Albanian and Serb alike, are liable to perish in the months ahead. Hundreds of thousands more face severe privation – a freezing winter without adequate shelter, electricity, heat, water or food. And the most vulnerable will be hardest hit – children, sick, elderly and disabled people as well as refugees and those who are internally displaced.

If you'd like to know more, write to me at the House of Commons, London SW1A OAA or phone +44 171 275 0164.

Alice Mahon MP
London, England

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

Letter from Lebanon

Bring back the hashish

Reem Haddad meets the farmers who want to grow dope.

HEARING the approach of our jeep, Kreida Awad, 75, glanced up from her seat outside her simple hut. Visitors in this rural area of Hermel in the Beka'a valley are rare but welcome. Kreida's daughter, Fatima, ran into the hut to prepare coffee for us while the other members of the family gathered outside and waited for our arrival. Their expression of pleasure immediately turned to frustration when they recognized the United Nations employees who jumped down from the jeep.

'Can you bring back the days of the hashish?' yelled Kreida. 'Can you bring back the days when we were alive?'

'Kreida, you know that planting hashish is illegal now,' explained one of the officials who sounded as if he had repeated the sentiment a million times. 'We want to help you cultivate other crops.'

'Here, look at the "other crops" we are planting,' said Fatima, pointing to a small patch of wheat. 'It's not enough. It costs a lot of money to buy water for the crop.'

Turning to me she asked: 'Are you here to help us?'

'Well, no,' I said rather awkwardly. 'I'm a journalist.'

Thinking this over, she came up to me. 'Then you tell people what is happening to us,' she said. 'Look. We are half dead. Our children are out of school. We had everything, now we have nothing.'

'Nothing' was an understatement, I thought, as I stared at the tiny one-room hut which housed all seven members of the family. It was constructed from piled stones daubed with white clay. The roof was made of tree branches and black bush leaves. Inside an oil lamp – the only source of light – was placed carefully in an indentation in the clay wall.

The blinding glare of the white clay contrasted with the green of the vast Jibeib al-Houmor valley overlooked by towering snow-covered mountains.

Only nine years ago, Kreida's family was living well – thanks to the cultivation of cannabis and opium. The practically non-existent government during the 16 years of civil war meant farmers were free to plant the illegal crops over most of the Beka'a Valley. Needing little water and care, the weeds even thrived on the edges of public roads. I remember as a child contemplating the thousands of opium poppies across acres and acres of fields during some rare trips to the Beka'a.

In 1991, however, bending to an international outcry, the Lebanese Government eradicated the narcotics – earning the country a clean bill of health from the United Nations. The farmers were promised alternative crops and irrigation systems. At least those were the promises made to the Government by donor countries. When very little funding came their way, the Government could do nothing to help the 54,000 farmers forced out of work.

The extreme poverty of the area finally led the United Nations Development Programme to set up micro-loans and irrigation systems for some of the farmers. But again, with the few funds available from donor countries, not much could be done.

The reason I was invited on this tour of Beka'a was to write an article which it was hoped would highlight the plight of the impoverished farmers and possibly re-awaken the conscience of the donor countries.

I felt helpless, however, as farmer after farmer recounted the same story. Abu Hassan was only one of thousands who can no longer afford his children's tuition fees and has had to pull all six out of school. Unable to purchase a plough, Abu Hassan and his family are forced to dig furrows by hand.

'I don't care if I plant hashish, apples, or potatoes,' he said. 'Just give us water.'

Much of the water in the Beka'a valley remains untapped. But creating the necessary irrigation systems would be expensive.

Mention the word 'hashish' and all eyes light up. Even though few farmers became rich from growing the narcotics, it nevertheless provided them with a steady income as traders clamoured to purchase their crops.

The only thing left to do, confided the farmers, is simply to return to growing the crop – a move which promises to create a mini-war between them and the Government which is eager to retain its untarnished, hashish-free image. ■

Reem Haddad is a reporter for the *Daily Star* in Beirut.

Broken promises – farmers in Lebanon were led to expect alternative crops and irrigation.

Update

HUMAN RIGHTS

Forgotten province

China's oppression furthers Uyghur separatist sentiment

ALTHOUGH China is well known for its abuses of human rights in Tibet and among its own people, it is also responsible for violent oppression in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), according to a briefing in the US Congress.

The Advocacy Director for Amnesty International USA, T Kumar, says that the XUAR, also known as Eastern Turkestan, is a 'forgotten province', due to the Chinese Government's travel restrictions and tough security measures.

Left in the shadows – the Uyghurs of China are used and abused.

CATHERINE PLATT / STILL PICTURES

Witnesses from the region, whose names are kept secret for their protection, spoke about their contact with the brutal policies of the Chinese Government. The XUAR is the only place within China where political prisoners are still being executed. More than one panellist related their first-hand knowledge of forced abortions. Those that object to the birth-control policies for traditional and religious reasons are sent to jail.

The panellists also detailed some of the degrading methods used to break the spirit of the Uyghur people, such as gang raping of Uyghur women, setting mad dogs on naked prisoners and the routine use of electric cattle prods to coax confessions.

Uyghur intellectuals spoke about the abuses suffered by anyone who dared to question Chinese authority. Translating an American book on Sino-Russian relations into Uyghur caused one panellist to be threatened by Chinese authorities and forced him to flee. Another panellist spoke about setting up an Uyghur cultural society to help young people stay away from drugs and alcohol, but the organization was smashed and the leaders sent to jail to be interrogated and tortured.

Mass Chinese immigration to Eastern Turkestan is making the Uyghurs a minority there. The Chinese population has grown from 6 per cent in 1949 to 38 per cent in 1997. Official documents state that Chinese population in the region must increase by 30 per cent by the year 2000.

This has a serious effect on Uyghur employment opportunities. In the XUAR, 99 per cent of petroleum workers are Chinese, as are 95 per cent of the employees of the XUAR, local governments and major industries.

Meanwhile the Government steals the region's riches – 100 million tons of petroleum products per year are extracted from Eastern Turkestan and sent to the People's Republic of China. Chinese mining interests inside the XUAR control 85 per cent of all their mining capacity.

The creation of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan as homelands for local peoples formerly dominated by Russia has been an inspiration to large numbers of the 16 millions Uyghurs. The contrast with their own position could hardly be greater, as the Chinese Government accelerates its programme of wiping out all traces of Uyghur culture, customs, traditions and religion while extracting all the natural resources from their land. ■

Material drawn from *Human Rights Violations in Western China: The Brutal Persecution of Uyghurs Continues*, House Human Rights Caucus.

The best espresso in Cape Town – but can it stop the gamma rays?

CHRIS SATTLBERGER / PANOS PICTURES

Nuclear radiation and the cuppa coffee

Coffee can save your body from the effects of radiation, according to scientists studying the health of caffeine-pumped mice in India. Researchers injected 471 mice with varying doses of caffeine and then exposed them to 7.5 grays of gamma radiation, a dose which usually kills. But, 25 days later, 70 per cent of the mice which were given large doses of caffeine an hour before radiation exposure were still alive. All of the 196 mice not given caffeine before radiation exposure died. Researcher Kachadpillill George suggests that caffeine reacts with the hydroxyl radicals produced when cells are irradiated, which prevents the radicals from damaging cells and shutting down vital bodily functions. But can caffeine protect human bodies from radiation? A person weighing 70 kilos might need to drink at least 100 cups of coffee to receive the same dose of caffeine as the mice. But George suggests that smaller amounts of caffeine may protect people from lower doses of radiation than those used in his experiment.

New Scientist No 2192

Taking their chances

Australians are the heaviest gamblers in the world, spending twice as much per head on gambling as people in Europe and North America – $7 billion last year. More than 80 per cent of Australians gamble and at least half of them do so once a week. Spending around $8,000 a year are 'problem gamblers', who comprise 2.3 per cent of the population.

Once gamblers bet on horses and bought lottery tickets, but now, after the recent legalization of gaming machines, Australia has 20 per cent of the world's gaming machines catering for only 0.3 per cent of the global population. Casinos have also spread across the country. One of the world's biggest casinos, the Crown, is in Melbourne, Victoria. The State Government of Victoria now derives more than 15 per cent of its revenue from gambling.

Economist Vol 352 No 8133

Booze, jail and no justice

More women are being put into overcrowded prisons for minor offences in Sudan. For example, the maximum capacity of the old Omdurman Prison for Women is 200 inmates but its population has exceeded 1,200 several times in recent history. The annual turnover is 11,200 inmates in this prison alone. And there could be over 200 children under four years old, without any food, bedding, shelter or medical care who live in the prison with their mothers. Ninety-five per cent of the female prisoners are in jail for brewing liquor, which is a crime in Northern Sudan.

Over 50 per cent of the inmates return to prison as they find liquor-brewing their only way to make a living. Instead of tackling the problem from a legal and social angle, the Government decided to increase the incarceration capacity of the prison. The number of imprisoned women rises daily.

Tag Elkhazin/Newslink Africa Vol 17 No 32

Makinfg the best of it : a party in Omdurman Women's Prison.

MICHAEL WALTER / PANOS PICTURES

Gentle persuasion: indigenous children in Mexico City's Zócalo Square.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

Migrants unwelcome in Mexico City

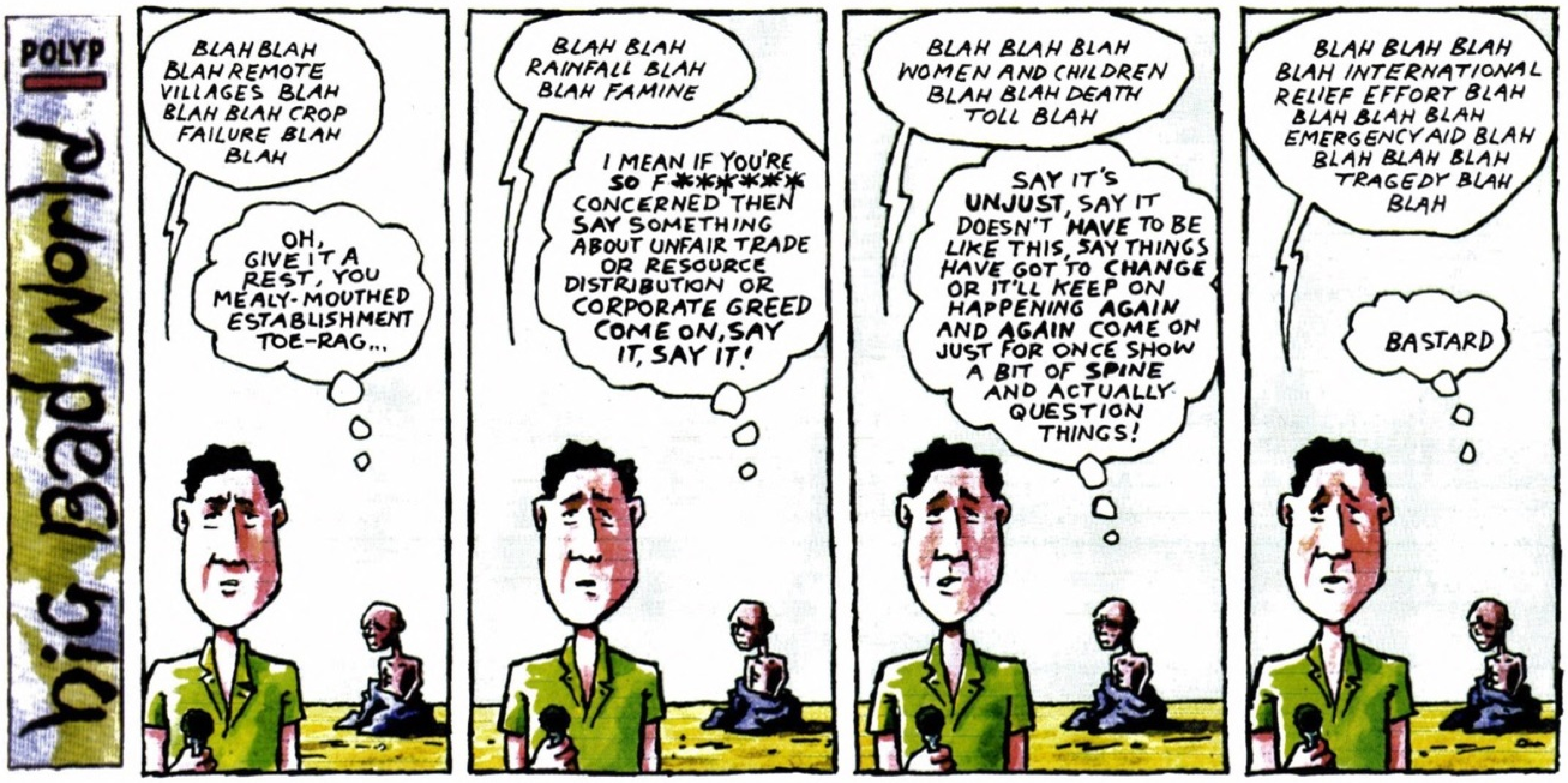
Indigenous Mexicans suffer from extreme poverty, racism and difficult living conditions in Mexico City. One in every twenty residents of Mexico's capital city is indigenous. A few still wear traditional clothing and preserve their culture, cultivating crops and maintaining meeting places, especially in the city's south. But for many, the benefits of urban development are few. About 43 per cent of the indigenous people say they have been mistreated by public officials, and 75 per cent say they did not know where to seek help in the case of such abuse. 'Although indigenous migrants resist the pressures of urban life and try to improve their situation, they find themselves at the most extreme level of poverty,' said Federico Martínez of the city's Secretariat of Education, Health and Social Development. 'They leave rural poverty to enter into a form of violent, inhumane poverty.'

Latin America Press Vol 31 No 30

Longer life, more obstacles

In the International Year for Older Persons, it is becoming clear that the problems of older people are predominantly those of women. There has been a general increase in life expectancy since 1950, although the levels of this increase vary widely between countries: in Uganda the life expectancy of women has increased two years, while in Japan it has increased by over twenty years. No scientific explanation has been established as to why women live longer although it is suggested that greater male exposure to risk factors such as smoking, alcohol and occupational hazards may be a factor. According to the US Bureau of the Census, at the age of 65 the proportion of disability-free life remaining tends to be less for women. Women's health and access to healthcare are disproportionately affected by high levels of poverty and economic dependence, violence, limited decision-making power and negative cultural attitudes.

Ageing and Development Issue 3


POLYP
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BLAH BLAH BLAH REMOTE VILLAGES BLAH BLAH BLAH CROP FAILURE BLAH BLAH
OH, GIVE IT A REST, YOU MEALY-MOUTHED ESTABLISHMENT TOE-RAG...
BLAH BLAH RAINFALL BLAH BLAH FAMINE
I MEAN IF YOU'RE SO F****** CONCERNED THEN SAY SOMETHING ABOUT UNFAIR TRADE OR RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION OR CORPORATE GREED COME ON, SAY IT, SAY IT!
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BASTARD

Update

POLLUTION

Buried but alive

Agent Orange is still on active duty in Thailand

Eight kilometres up the dusty road north out of Hua Hin in Thailand there is an airstrip called Bo Fai. During the invasion of Vietnam the Americans took it over. There they mixed together chemicals. Just a few – Merphos, Dimethoate, Dicamba, Tordon, Endothal, Tributil Phosphate, Diquat, Triazophos, Butylated Hydroxy Toluene and of course those old favourites Benzene, 2-4D and 2-4-5T. Then from a variety of military planes they dropped them on the Vietnamese. They called it 'Agent Orange'.

Between 1962, when Kennedy began his chemical bloodbath against the Vietnamese people, and 1975, when the Americans ran from the country, the US Air Force dropped 50 million litres of Agent Orange on Vietnam, according to the Pentagon.

And it is not over in Hua Hin. To get tourists to come to Hua Hin they need a proper airport, so in 1998 they started digging up Bo Fai. And guess what they found? The Americans had simply buried Agent Orange in barrels at the end of the runway. Of course Agent Orange, being what it is, had corroded its way out into the surrounding soil. Dioxin poisoning was everywhere.

At first no-one knew what to do. The Thai Government system is hugely corrupt, massively influenced by the ever-menacing hand of the military and often open to bribery due to their pitiful resources.

Pollution and police in Bangkok – but Thais are threatened by more sinister poisons.

PAUL QUAYLE / PANOS PICTURES

The IMF and the World Bank have openly encouraged Thailand to have 'zero investment' in environmental protection and therefore encourage foreign capital. There is no way to prosecute anybody in Thailand for dioxin poisoning because there are no effective laws against it.

So back at Bo Fai the Government carried on as normal. They decided to dump it. Unfortunately for them, they dumped it on land owned by a relative of a local official, Khunnawut Orsuwan. Then they covered it over with asphalt. The Government is blaming the construction company and says it has 'asked the local police to discuss the matter with the Hua Hin airport authority'.

Eventually the Government was forced to get the soil analyzed. By whom? The trusty US Environmental Protection Agency of course. But even the US Government had to admit to some kind of contamination. When the report was released the Thai Government astoundingly heralded it as a clean bill of health. 'It (the dioxin) poses no threat,' chirped Sirithan Pairoj-Boriboon, the deputy secretary to the Ministry Of Science, whilst the Ministry's Chief Inspector Supavit Piamphongsant said it was 'within acceptable levels'. These acceptable levels are 50 times above the standard set for dioxin contamination in the soil in the US, at 2.02 parts per billion. Liability is denied by the US Government and so far it has refused to comment. No doubt it hopes the controversy will just seep away. ■

Adam Porter

Slain in the search for peace

Lawyer, academic and civil-society activist Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam has been killed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are fighting for an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka. As a senior member of the Tamil United Liberation Front and Member of Parliament, Dr Thiruchelvam promoted the creation of a new constitution for Sri Lanka that would provide redress for minority grievances while also accommodating the aspirations and protecting the rights of all ethnic groups in the country. He was believed to have played a major role in the development of the People's Alliance Government's proposals for devolution of power to eight regional councils. Dr Thiruchelvam's murder by a suicide bomber has been attributed to the LTTE, who have terrorized Tamils seeking non-violent solutions to the conflict.

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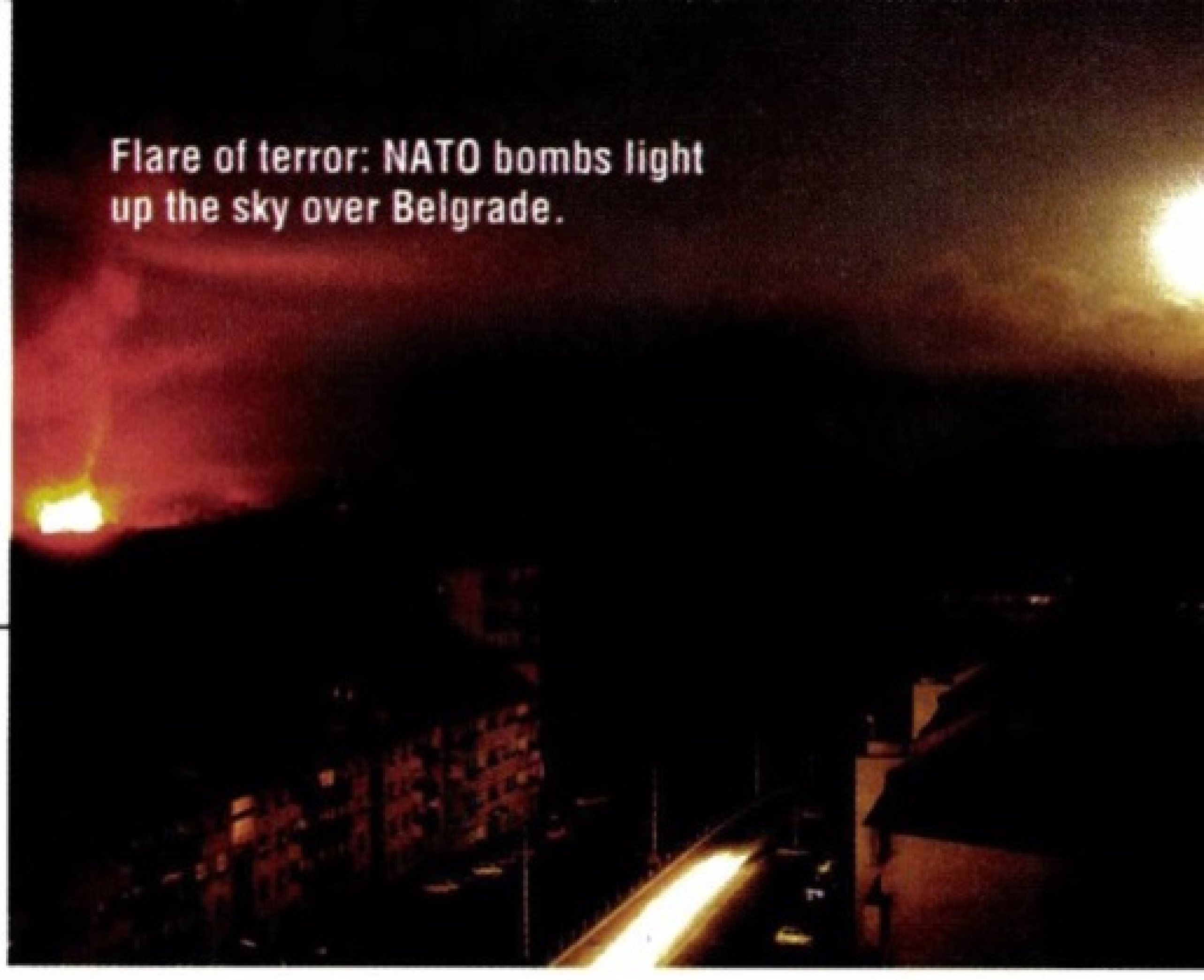


Flare of terror: NATO bombs light up the sky over Belgrade.

US & NATO face charge of war crimes

A Commission of Inquiry for an International War Crimes Tribunal has been initiated by former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark. The Commission will hold hearings to collect eyewitness accounts, direct and expert testimony, video footage, photographs, documents and other evidence as part of an investigation into war crimes committed during the US/NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

The Commission of Inquiry will include international jurists, human-rights activists, trade unionists, medical personnel, environmental experts, rank-and-file soldiers from NATO countries, and people who were in Yugoslavia during the bombing. Clark is in the process of outlining a multi-point indictment of the US Government's conduct in the war against Yugoslavia. The International Action Center is now in the process of organizing similar hearings throughout the United States, in other NATO countries, Russia and elsewhere. At the conclusion of these hearings, an International War Crimes Tribunal will be convened that will consider all of the evidence.

For further information contact: Commission of Inquiry, c/o International Action Center, 39 West 14 St, #206 New York, NY 10011. Tel: +1 212 633 6646. Fax: +1 212 633 2889. E-mail: iacenter@iacenter.org website: www.iacenter.org

Amazon killed for city growth

Brazil is now the biggest consumer of tropical hardwood as well as being the world's biggest producer, according to a report by Friends of the Earth and the Institute for People and the Environment in the Amazon based in Belém. The study concludes that southern Brazil has 'the most intense consumption of tropical timber in the world' and urges policy changes to reduce the domestic timber market as well as limiting timber production. Brazil consumes 23 per cent of the world's tropical hardwood, followed by Japan at 19 per cent.

New Scientist Vol 162 No 2192

Quote

‘Turkeys have smaller brains than wild birds – these are creatures that can drown themselves by staring up at the rain for too long’

Rosie Mestel

FIRDIA LISNAWATI / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Indonesia
Power of protest

On the streets of Jakarta, people are tearing down the guarded gate to freedom. **Anouk Ride** joins them at the beginning of her journey through Indonesia.

'WHAT do they think about Indonesia in your country?' asks an Indonesian student, as we wait for a taxi in Jakarta. He adds with a cheeky grin: 'Do they think we are still rioting?'

It is true that many Westerners doubted my sanity in visiting Indonesia at this 'unsafe' time. But I replied: 'Well, people in Australia know the election happened and there was no violence then. And this makes them happy,' I reply.

This answer pleases him. His posture straightens and he says proudly: 'Yes, there was no violence. It was democratic. It's good.'

I had been told that Jakarta was smoggy, crowded and ugly. But, amidst the locals' frenzy and excitement over their newly won ability to speak, vote and hope to recreate freedom, I could pay little attention to the scenery. For anyone who has become disillusioned, bored or blasé about democracy, Jakarta is the place to rediscover what politics is meant to be all about.

This year Indonesia had only the second

(Over page) Facing the military head on – a protester in Jakarta. (Above) Run for it: looters grab what they can in the May 1998 riots. (Right) Streets stained red – Megawati's supporters out in force.

PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER

free national election in its entire history. The collection of 17,000 islands had a variety of local rulers till the Dutch colonized the country in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When they finally left and Indonesia won its independence after World War Two, a new form of colonialism from within took their place – the island of Java dominates a centralized system of political and military rule.

This began under the populist independence leader Sukarno who was elected President in the last free elections in 1955. But it reached the height of its oppression under General Suharto, who violently took power ten years later (see box). For the next 32 years, a form of élite and military rule controlled land, natural resources, the legal system, bureaucracy, business and freedom of speech. It became stronger and more vigorous with age, mimicking eternity. A joke circulated in Jakarta that an Egyptian mummy rose to life and saw in his tomb an American, an Australian and an Indonesian. The mummy, in a rather arrogant tone, said he'd never heard of the US or Australia and said their two nationals must be frauds. But the mummy jovially asked the Indonesian: 'Tell me, is Suharto still the Javanese King of Indonesia?'

Jakarta is the place to rediscover what politics is meant to be all about

The first to challenge Suharto, in the mid-1990s, were the students who pounded the city streets with their idealistic visions of democracy, arguing for an end to the military's unquestioned power and for freedom of speech. The reporters chased them with their tape recorders, collecting their ever-more-ready soundbites. Some academics and intellectuals stopped pussyfooting about and joined in. Then the economic crisis hit in 1997: the price of rice quadrupled and employees were sacked or saw their wages fall by 77 per cent. Faced with no job to go to and a seemingly ineffectual government response to economic disaster, almost everyone joined the protest – from stockbrokers to sweatshop slaves.

The shooting by snipers of four students at Trisakti University on 12 May 1998 triggered rampages and the city erupted into rioting. In the days that followed, seemingly as a part of the military's crackdown and subsequent attempts to present themselves as restorers of law and order, organized gangs roamed the streets. Around 1,900 people died, hundreds of rapes were committed and $265 million worth of damage was done to property.

Fortunately, this terror did not dent the courage of the demonstrators. In one dramatic rally they actually occupied the parliament building and scaled its roof, as shown on the cover of this magazine. At the end of May, Suharto was forced to step down and a provisional President, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, took his place. Habibie agreed to hold free elections, and around 100 million people voted in June this year – making Indonesia the world's third biggest democracy. (Political commentator Olle Thornquist notes it is actually the second biggest since so few Americans actually vote.)

Even though the election rallies are over by the time I arrive in Jakarta, the protests continue while the votes are being counted. I watch a parade of red-clad PRD (Peoples' Democratic Party) supporters from all over Indonesia outside the national electoral commission. They scream allegations of dirty tricks by Suharto's party Golkar and demand its disqualification from the electoral race. Because it has the most radical political platform and was one of the first groups to speak out against Suharto and the military, the PRD is still seen as a threat – its offices are attacked and its leaders regularly harassed by those in power.

The protest in front of the electoral commission leads to a clash between the police and the PRD in which 81 are injured. I meet one of the wounded the next day, a student with a bandage wrapped round his head and a big grin on his face. He has just participated in another rally to protest about what had happened the day before and to reiterate the protesters' demands: 'The military are getting 38 unelected seats in parliament, for free. Now Golkar are cheating. They should be disqualified.' With his friends he shouts at the camera: '*Reformasi*! (Reformation!)' '*Reformasi total*!' adds another from behind. This is what makes the PRD different from other parties; they demand the total rebuilding of the political system.

The other political action on the street is the collection of signatures or bloody thumbprints to show support for Megawati Sukarnoputri – leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, PDI-P – as the next President of Indonesia. Great long white banners line the freeways as hordes of pedestrians declare their support and people leap out of their cars to sign amidst the horn-honks of cars waiting to pass. Megadollars, the fake 50,000 *rupiah* note with Megawati's face rather than Suharto's, are passed to drivers through their car windows. Megawati's supporters do not rest even though the election is finished. They know they have to keep up the pressure so that members of parliament will vote for her as President.

As you read this article, the new Indonesian parliament's first session will be wrangling over this issue. In June the PDI-P and its leader Megawati won the most votes. Daughter of President Sukarno, who died under house arrest, and herself thrown out of the parliament by Suharto, Megawati symbolizes the struggle against the repressive regime. A silent battler but a charismatic public figure, this woman holds the hopes of ordinary citizens who want an end to the corruption and repression that has shaped their lives till now.

Many intellectuals, politicians and journalists from Indonesia and overseas revile her. To these commentators Megawati is false or stupid, power-hungry or ineffectual, trading on the fame of Sukarno or seeking revenge from Suharto, uneducated or over-reliant on friends for advice, all talk but no action for change. All these speculations are beside the point. Megawati is what the people voted for. And even if the worst projections are true, has a democracy ever elected an intellectually challenged President? Enter stage right, Ronald Reagan. Has a democracy elected leaders that talk about change but really bolster the status quo? Hello, Tony Blair. Taken the leadership while settling a personal score? Greetings, Paul Keating.

Megawati's supporters are clear about what they want – an end to 'Ka-Ka-N' (Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism), democratic reform and peace in the streets. And as in all other democratic systems, if their expectations are not met Megawati's power will dwindle and they will try someone else. Even if Megawati is disastrous as a national leader, this will be part of a democratic process; Indonesians will learn through political experience. Time will tell.

But now that pro-democracy supporters have burst open the doors to parliament, they must face another obstacle to reform – a bolted gate that stretches from the ground to the tips of the trees, topped with coils of barbed wire. It is the Indonesian military.

When Suharto fell, the dual political and security role of the military, known as *dwifungsi*, was at last openly challenged. The military tried to quell dissent with small reforms – military officers can no longer be appointed to civilian government positions, the police were separated from the armed forces and the military did not interfere in the free elections. Indoctrinated to believe they were loved by the people who cherished their protection, defiance has shocked the military without diminishing its lethal power.

In Jakarta, the military's force has been most dramatically and recently felt by the ethnic Chinese. Although documentation of police and military involvement in victimizing ethnic Chinese in the May riots last year was widely circulated, no action has been taken against the commanders or their hired *preman* (troublemakers or 'rascals' who work amongst the people). Around 130 Chinese women suffered multiple rape in just two days, 13-14 May 1998, giving the city a taste of the organized sexual violence found most commonly in Aceh and East Timor.

The Chinese rape victims are unable or unwilling to speak out. And people working for the Volunteers for Humanity – an organization which sprung up to help the rape victims, their traumatized families and witnesses and other victims of military-sponsored violence during the riots are to this day working underground rather than being publicly identifiable and open to retaliation.

Esther Indahyani Jusuf, a member of the Chinese community who works as an anti-racism activist says: 'The May riots appeared to be very organized between the

DERMOT TATLOW / PANOS

Suharto's slaughter

Suharto became national leader when at least half a million (and possibly over a million) people were killed in a systematic countrywide slaughter of anyone suspected of communist sympathies. The bloodletting began following the murder of six generals on 1 October 1965 during an alleged communist coup attempt. Some historians allege that the generals were actually murdered not by left-wingers but as a result of inter-military rivalries. But the generals' death provided Suharto with the perfect opportunity not only to consolidate power but also to eliminate a generation of potentially troublesome left-wing activists.

Journalist Rati Hojerno says Indonesians only talk about what happened in 1965 amongst family. 'I think it has to do with the shame that things like this happen,' she says. 'We Indonesians are supposed to be the keepers of a long and deep civilization.' There are calls for a new curricular focus on this episode of Indonesian history – till now generations of school kids have visited museums displaying bloodthirsty communists murdering their captives and had to write reports on anti-communist films. People with links to the Communist Party are shunned from the civil service and public positions. Now, the nationwide Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, is reportedly considering whether to issue a public apology for its role in the killing – in Java, Islamic clerics and youth groups whipped up anti-communist fervour and violence.

MUKA PENGHIANAT
FIRAUN ORBA

PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER

But the shame does not just rest with Indonesians. According to former CIA Director William Colby, among others, in 1965 a list of 5,000 left-wing activists was handed by the US to the Indonesian army. The Americans later checked off the names of those who had been killed or captured, as reported by Kathy Kadane in US newspapers in 1990. Kadane quotes Robert J Martens, a former member of the US Embassy's political section and consultant to the State Department, who says: 'They probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that's not all bad. There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment.'

A new research institute spearheaded by novelist and ex-political prisoner Pramoedya Ananta Toer plans to dig up mass graves and interview victims' families in an attempt to get to the truth of what happened. At the end of Pramoedya's recently released memoirs (*The Mute's Soliloquy*) is a list of the 315 political prisoners arrested between 1965 and 1970 who are known to have died on Buru Island, one of the islands where Pramoedya was held for a total of 12 years. Pramoedya writes: 'Following the events of 1965, I lost everything or, to be more accurate, all the illusions I had ever owned. I was a newborn child, outfitted with the only instrument a newly born babe finds necessary for life: a voice. Thus like a child my only means of communication was my voice: my screams, cries, whimpers and yelps.' ■

Reformasi
KONSTITUSIONAL

Using their heads – women demand political change. (Below) Monas tower – the view from the top.

PATRICK AVENTURIER / FRANK SPOONER

military and President because the fact that they let it happen implicates them. I'm pretty sure there was an order from the top just to let this violence happen, creating the conditions for more racist attacks. When we confronted the military with evidence that they were responsible, they rejected our facts. Now they are scaring the non-governmental organizations. And not one military person has been arrested.'

Defiance has shocked the military without diminishing its lethal power

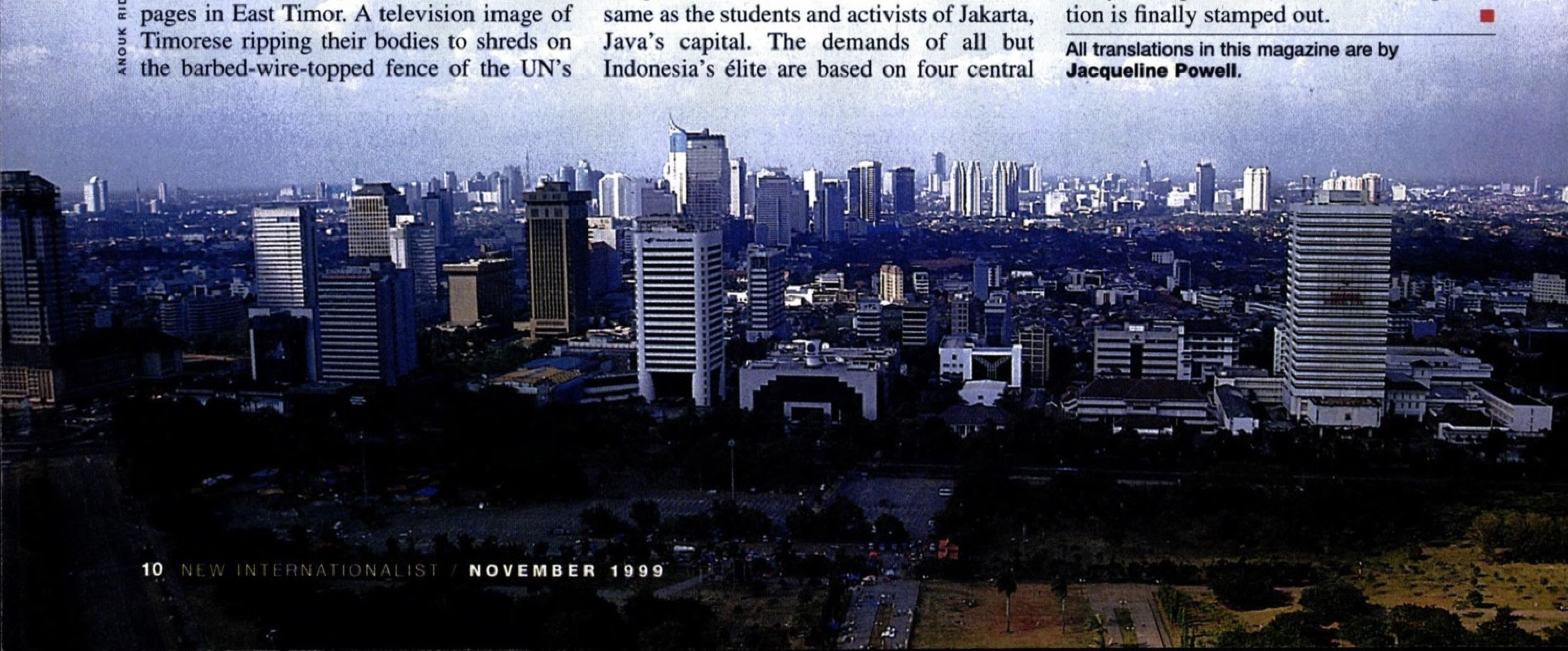
I thought of Esther and the other ethnic Chinese who live in fear of a military force that is not identifiable by uniforms when I saw recent media reports of the militia rampages in East Timor. A television image of Timorese ripping their bodies to shreds on the barbed-wire-topped fence of the UN's Dili headquarters, in an attempt to escape the violence, made my heart pound with frustration and fury. Not just for the Timorese, but for all those Indonesians still in the military's clutches – the rape victims; the Christians and Muslims on the island of Ambon, provoked into attacking one another; the indigenous people dying for the land taken from them; and the millions of others scarred by Suharto's legacy whose cause is not championed by the rest of the world. I travelled to the outermost regions of Indonesia – from the northernmost war-ridden province of Aceh to the easternmost territory of West Papua (Irian Jaya) to see their hidden scars and hear their untold stories.

Although they all revile Javanese political power, I found their desires were the same as the students and activists of Jakarta, Java's capital. The demands of all but Indonesia's élite are based on four central needs: to get the military out of politics and out of their lives; to reform the political system and free it from corruption; to use natural resources for the good of locals, not landlords; and to create a system for people, not powermongers.

At the heart of the capital I climbed a tower, Monas, where I saw the streets of Jakarta spread out before me in all its concrete vastness. The tower was built by the Government to provide a spectacular view for visitors from abroad and from the outer islands. Here I realized how Indonesia's leaders have seen their nation – huge, full of possibilities, a panorama in which the people are tiny; antlike in significance to the overall vision. Finally, Indonesians are changing the scenery – not from above, but from the streets where their feet will be noisy, disruptive and restless until exploitation is finally stamped out. ■

All translations in this magazine are by **Jacqueline Powell.**

ANOUK RIDE



Good Citizen Sari

WANDERING THROUGH A MARKET I spot a headline that makes me grab *The Jakarta Post* and wave it excitedly: 'Look, Dita Sari has been freed!'

Dita is one of my heroines. At the age of 21 she led thousands of workers in protest against the Suharto regime. Her activism became notorious and in 1994 she faced her sentence wearing a headband that said simply: 'Democracy or Death!' Now she tells what it is like to be released into post-Suharto Indonesia.

'At 12 o'clock, the middle of the night, the guards entered my cell and said I should prepare myself because I was being released. I told them: "I don't believe you." I was angry: "You are just disturbing my sleep!" And I went back to sleep. But suddenly it all came true! It's true!' she exclaims, still in wonderment.

'I was released mostly because lots of pressure was on the Government from the international groups and solidarity from inside Indonesia. Pressure accumulated from all over the world. I thank you for all that. It shows that worker solidarity is more universal than any other kind of solidarity, we are from different backgrounds but we still stand by each other. It's amazing to me.

'I was imprisoned for no good reason. I was a good citizen,' she laughs and leans forward as though about to tell me a secret: 'But, I am against the Government!' The joke continues: 'I never overspeed on the road although I am in a hurry, I never steal, I always cross the street in the right place. A whole lot of nice things, I do. But I'm definitely against the Government!

'It began when I was 21 living in one room with workers, talking and sharing meals,' she explains. 'I realized I had to do something for them because I know for myself it's not human to live in these conditions. They had low wages, no allowances, bad working conditions, but on top of that a lack of political power, no freedom of association and intervention by the military in negotiations and demonstrations.'

'We explained to the workers – we cannot just talk about wages, allowances and that. "Who made the rules that make your wages so low? It is the Government, so you are also against the Government." We related politics to the urgent needs of workers.

'The Government was angry and that's why I was put in jail.' She stresses: 'They didn't like it at all! Especially the military. Because in 1994 when we set up this union (the People's Democratic Union, later to become the PRD or People's Democratic Party) they put one of their demands as abolishing the dual function of the military. At that time no other groups made that kind of demand because of the repression that might come. And it made the military really angry because they are not used to being criticized, especially about their principles. So we became, kind of... notorious!'

The other thing that has made the workers' movement infamous is the prominent involvement of women. 'Most of the export garment and textile workers are women. Unions and struggles are considered men's territory, which it is not and we have to prove that this is wrong.' She adds with a touch of mocking: '"Politics are men, this belongs to men." It's not!'

Now that Dita is free she says things have changed but not enough: 'Since Suharto went, it looks like democracy but it's not. Organizations with a mass base try to set up a union, they apply to the Ministry of Manpower to register it with a list of names of the officials of the union. But most of the time the process is slowed so sometimes it takes ten months before a union is legal.

And the second thing is the names of new union officials are sent to the company so the boss knows who they are – and when they strike the officials are fired. This happens all the time. So the business, bureaucracy, the military and the Government are united against the workers. This is not democracy. OK, the press is alive, we can talk about anything but the journalists can be charged with association with a person that they write about. And the real function of the military is still there. So democracy is not rich yet. It's like Paul McCartney said: "The long and winding road that leads to your door".'

Dita's first action upon being freed was to visit her mother's grave. She had died while Dita was imprisoned and unable to obtain permission to attend the funeral. The experience of prison has made her struggle more personal, she says.

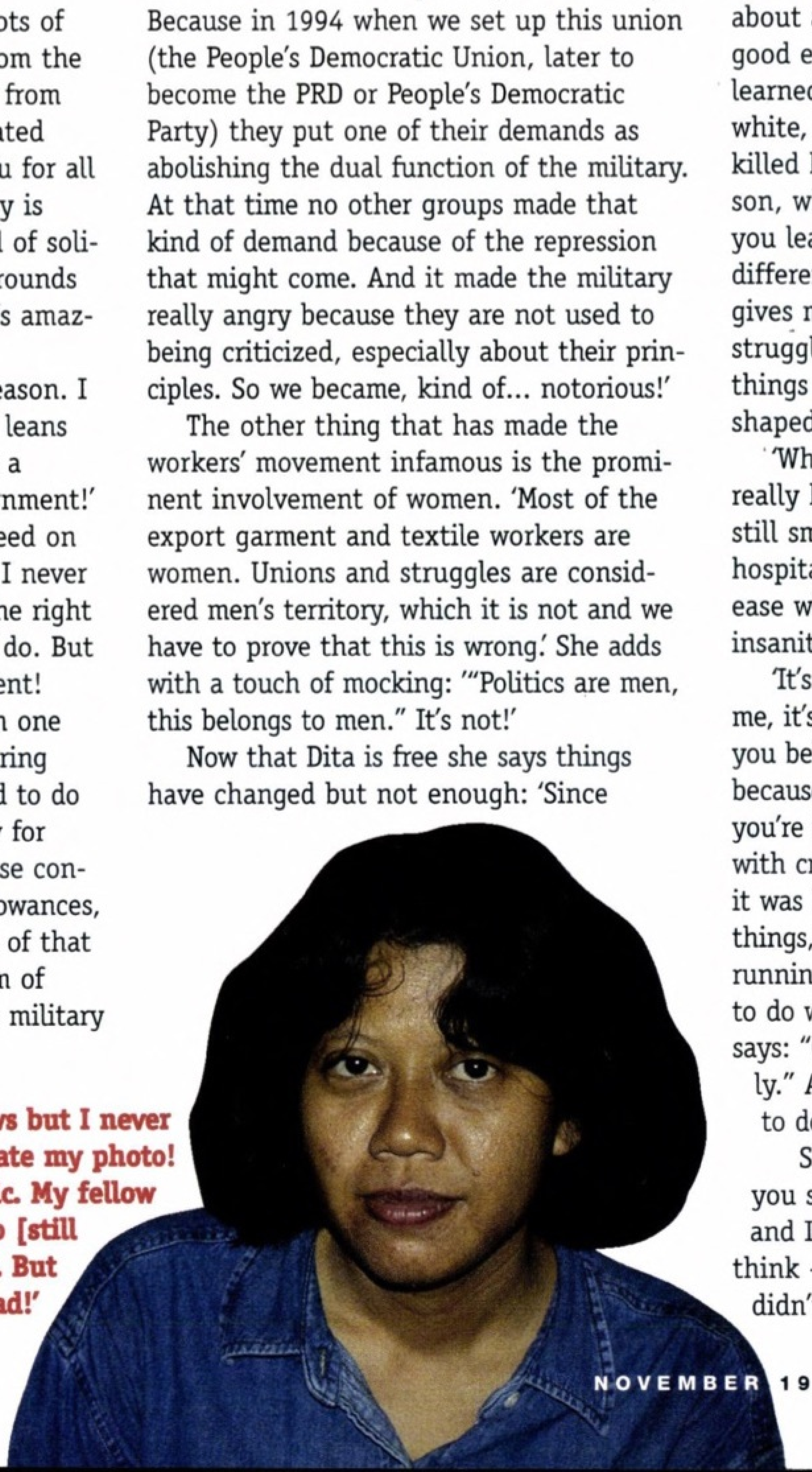
'It's a women's prison, it's filled with women's talk, women's issues,' she says wearily, rolling her eyes. 'You talk about babies, you talk about husbands, you talk about all these things; it's tiring. But it's a good experience because in the prison I learned about life. Life is not black and white, it's lots of colours. Why a woman killed her husband, why she killed her own son, why she stole, why she sold her body; you learn about that. It's interesting to see different lives, different points of view. It gives me a more human influence in my struggle. I hated to be in prison but all the things I experienced when I was inside shaped me a lot.'

'When I was let out it was like: is this really happening? Is this really me? I can still smell the prison.' (Dita was admitted to hospital with typhoid in late 1997, a disease which is commonly caused by insanitary living conditions).

'It's harder when you're outside. Believe me, it's true. OK, it's painful inside because you believe your treatment is unfair, because you cannot be with the people, you're isolated and also you have to deal with criminals. But when I was let out I felt it was harder. There's more life. Lots of things, lots of work. I feel like someone is running after me. I don't have enough time to do what I want to do. Then my brother says: "Come to Bali, you need time for family." And I say OK, OK, but there are things to do here as well! It's definitely harder!'

She stops for breath. 'But it makes you satisfied. This is the work that I love and I identify myself with. I stop and think – what would my whole life mean if I didn't do this?' ■

'I have done a lot of interviews but I never collect the clippings. I hate my photo! Megawati is so photogenic. My fellow activist, Budiman Sudjatmiko [still imprisoned], he's so handsome. But me? Oh, it's bad!'



ANOUK RIDE

Tree that grows

GENERAL PRABOWO SUBIANTO, HUSBAND OF TITIEK.

Jobs: Commander of the Army Strategic Reserve, KOSTRAD.[6] Removed from office after Suharto's resignation amid allegations of responsibility for human-rights abuses including inflaming the May 1998 riots.

Prabowo is one of the key sponsors of the US-Indonesia Society, a pro-Suharto US front group launched in 1994 and backed by the military, US corporations and former government officials.[6]

Investments and significant interests: held by his wife. [3]

Other attributes: Prabowo has been on good terms with the US military, participating in joint training exercises and meeting top-level defence and State Department officials. Prabowo is creative in his solutions to conflict – he once chaired a meeting which debated whether or not to assassinate Bishop Carlos Belo of East Timor.[6]

BAMBANG TRIHATMODJO, SUHARTO'S MIDDLE SON.

Jobs: Bambang controls the biggest of the Suharto conglomerates, the Bimantara Group.[3]

Investments: In Indonesia, Bambang is involved in infrastructure, chemicals, telecommunications, multimedia, hotels, a television station, mining, property and consumer goods. [3] He also has an $8-million penthouse in Singapore and a $12-million mansion in an exclusive neighbourhood of Los Angeles, two doors down from Rod Stewart.[1]

Holds significant interests in: 327 companies in Indonesia.[3]

Other attributes: Estimated worth = $3 billion.[4]

SITI HEDIATI PRABOWO (NICKNAMED 'TITIEK'), SUHARTO'S MIDDLE DAUGHTER.

Jobs: Heads Maharani Group.[3]

Investments: Banks, financial services, shopping centres and a cement producer in Indonesia.[3] Titiek was a partner of Naomi Campbell, Claudia Schieffer and Elle Macpherson in their Fashion Cafe in Jakarta.[3]

Holds significant interests in: 70 Indonesian companies.[3]

Other attributes: A star in the military, her husband General Prabowo.[6]

SIGIT HARJOJUDANTO, SUHARTO'S ELDEST SON.

Jobs: Assistant in 'administrative matters' to Bre-X, the company whose gold discovery was later found to be a fraud. Bre-X reportedly put Sigit on a retainer of a million dollars a month for 40 months.[3]

Investments: Arseto and Panutan Groups in Indonesia[1]; two residences in East Finchley, London, recently put on the market for almost $16 million[5]; and a nine-million-dollar home in Los Angeles[1].

Holds significant interests in: 115 Indonesian companies.[3]

Other attributes: Estimated worth = $800 million.[4]

SITI HARDIYANTI RUKMANA (NICKNAMED 'TUTUT'), SUHARTO'S DAUGHTER AND ELDEST CHILD.

Jobs: Social Affairs Minister. Duties included persuading the public they should eat rabbit when the rise in the price of chicken made it unaffordable.[2] Head of Citra Agratama Persada Group.[3]

Investments: Toll roads, mining companies, a flour mill, hotels, a television station and banks in Indonesia.[3] Tutut has an apartment in London and a spacious home in Boston.[2]

Holds significant interests in: 111 companies in Indonesia.[3]

Other attributes: Estimated worth = $700 million.[4]

SITI HUTAMI ENDANG ADYNINGSIH (NICKNAMED 'MAMIEK'), SUHARTO'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER.

Jobs: Mamiek is a newcomer to business, mostly as a shareholder.[3]

Investments: Mobile telecommunications, land reclamation and aircraft leasing in Indonesia.[3]

Holds significant interests in: Six Indonesian companies.[3]

Other attributes: An influential husband Pratikto Singgih, head of chemical companies owned by the large Gadjah Tunggul Group.[3]

HUTOMO MANDALA PUTRA (NICKNAMED 'TOMMY'), SUHARTO'S YOUNGEST SON.

Jobs: Tommy is creator of many new Suharto ventures.

Investments: In Indonesia, Tommy has interests in high technology, tourism in Bali, the soybean-crushing monopoly and involvement in the clove-trading monopoly.[3] Tommy bought Lamborghini, maker of racy Italian cars, from Chrysler and recently sold it again to Germany's Volkswagen for $60 million.[3] Other overseas investments include a $75-million investment in a logging concession in Burma[7] and a 75- per-cent stake in an 18-hole golf course with 22 luxury apartments in Ascot, England.[1]

Holds significant interests in: 127 Indonesian companies.[3]

Other attributes: Tommy was the brains behind the National Car project. Supposedly an indigenous product, these cars were actually Kia Sephia sedans from Korea. Called the Timor, the car was vastly unpopular as drivers of them were liable to be beaten up in some parts of Jakarta. A free Timor was reportedly offered to José Ramos Horta in a futile attempt to accord it some legitimacy. [3]

ARI HARYO WIBOWO SIGIT HARJOJUDENTO (NICKNAMED 'ARI SIGIT'), SUHARTO'S OLDEST GRANDSON.

Jobs: Ari Sigit's schemes include selling a sticker that had to be put on all beers sold in Bali and requiring all schoolchildren to buy shoes his company made at $7.50 per pair. Both these were dropped due to public outcry, but his successful plans include creating a cartel which controlled the import of swiftlets' nests (a gourmet delicacy for the Chinese), and controlling the import of Chinese medicines.[3]

Investments: In Indonesia, Ari Sigit is involved in trade, distribution of imports, licences.[3]

Holds significant interests in: 28 Indonesian companies.[3]

Other attributes: He wants everything to be Sexy. His next plan is to launch a brand similar to Richard Branson's Virgin label – brand name 'Sexy' including Sexy clothes, Sexy Cafe and Sexy soft drinks.[3]

'It's a lie,' said Suharto shortly after *Time* published an investigation into the family's wealth. 'If they don't have proof and facts to back it up, it is slander and defamation. Honestly, that's more cruel than murder.'[8]

money

President Suharto did not just seize political power – during his 32-year-long rule, his family amassed a fortune estimated to be worth $15 billion.[1] Here we profile eight branches of the family tree.

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1 John Colmey & David Liebhold, 'All in the Family', *Time* 24 May 1999. **2** *Far Eastern Economic Review* 9 April 1998. **3** Michael Backman, *Asian Eclipse: Exposing the Dark Side of Business in Asia* (John Wiley and Sons, 1999). **4** *The Jakarta Post* 2 June 1999. **5** Tapol Website www.gn.apc.org/tapol/ **6** Allen Nairn, 'Our Men in Jakarta', *Nation* 30 March 1998. **7** Edward Aspinall, Herb Feith, Gerry Van Klinken eds., *The last days of President Suharto* (Monash Asia Institute, 1999). **8** Agence France Presse, 21 May 1999.

PHOTOS: PHOTOS BOTTOM LEFT CLOCKWISE: ANDY HERNANDEZ/FRANK SPOONER; DITA ALANGKARA/AAP; CORBIS /AP; ANDY HERNANDEZ/FRANK SPOONER; CORBIS/AFP; CORBIS/AFP; CORBIS/AFP;
PHOTO OF SUHARTO: CORBIS/AFP
BACKGROUND PHOTO: CORBIS

Terrorizing the truth

Stuck in the middle – Aceh has 100,000 refugees.

The secrecy of Aceh's hidden war is startling. Few in the West know that the local Aceh Merdeka rebels in Indonesia's northernmost province have been fighting the military for as long as Fretilin in East Timor. The news portrays the Indonesian military as the villains. But I found another story that nobody wants told.

'IF you ask who committed human-rights abuses in Aceh, that's a hard one to answer. You should talk to the refugees. The refugees will tell you the truth.'

I did not know it then, but community worker Afrizal had just given me the most useful piece of advice I could have wished for amidst the fear and violence that dominates Aceh. During a 25-year civil conflict – between the Indonesian military, who are notorious for their repression, and Aceh Merdeka, a well-armed rebel group demanding independence – a once proud and vibrant people have seen massacres, 'disappearances', schools destroyed and now 100,000 traumatized refugees living in makeshift camps.

ANOUK RIDE

The interview with Afrizal is difficult. Suspicion and anxiety seem trapped inside the four walls of the office. Afrizal and the others sitting in a circle around me have at least as many questions for me as I have for them: what can I do for them? Do I support Aceh Merdeka? What do I intend to write about?

It is my first talk with an activist in Aceh; I hardly know what I intend. I have heard the unanimous opinion of Java-based and international organizations and 'experts' on Aceh – that the military is responsible for the vast majority of human-rights abuses. I have read the daily newspaper reports – man shot down in the street, no-one knows who is responsible; 100 schools burnt in villages, culprits not found. I tell Afrizal that I am confused about what is happening in Aceh.

'It's not just our friends in Australia who are confused,' he says, 'We are all confused.' Yet I'm left with the impression he knows more than he's willing to tell.

As we leave he suddenly becomes apologetic: 'Sorry if we are suspicious of friends from other countries. We have exposed information before but until now it hasn't been reported; it hasn't helped and we've been disappointed. If we take the wrong step we'll be hit by Aceh Merdeka. If we pass on the wrong information we will be chased by the military. So we're in this difficult position.'

I ask if he can give us figures: the number of people killed, missing. 'You can go next door,' says Afrizal. 'We used to be able to provide figures but we don't any more.'

And so we go next door to another coalition of non-governmental organizations. The cool of the air-conditioned office is in marked contrast to Afrizal's office, as are the computers and the fact sheets. So is the English-speaking journalist there, Wiratmadinata, who is keen to talk about the period when Aceh was under 'military operation status' (under which the army has extra powers) from 1989 to 1998: 'During these bad years at least 5,000 or 6,000 people died because of the military, there were many cases of torture, raping, kidnapping and other violence. It's only in the last two years that this information is being collected and presented to the public.'

What about the current human-rights situation? 'According to the data for the past three months there are almost 100 victims of mysterious killings, hundreds of school buildings and local official buildings have been burnt down and there have been massacres as well. Even the raping by the special riot troops is worse now. If you ask me who does all these bad things; the massacres and rapes are obviously the military. But the mysterious killings and burning down of schools it's just a mystery.'

Wiratmadinata suddenly becomes animated: 'Why can't the police and military catch even one mysterious killer? They can arrest people who keep morphine or marijuana so secretly... Yet mysterious killings happen in the middle of the market and nobody is arrested. I think the central government plays games; they set the scene for this scandal.'

And Aceh Merdeka, is it responsible for human-rights abuses? 'Since 1976 Aceh Merdeka has been fighting for the people and they never kill the civilians. We have no reports of them killing civilians. The military say Aceh Merdeka did these bad things – the school burnings, the mysterious killings – but they have no proof. At least until now.'

That night I ponder the difference between these two activists I have met. Afrizal fearful, suspicious but apologetic, wanting to say more perhaps: 'Aceh Merdeka is not all of Aceh, but that's only my opinion.'

And then there was Wiratmadinata who was pleased to talk but insisted Aceh Merdeka had committed no human-rights violations: 'Aceh Merdeka came to the refugee camps to care for the people. They organize them and they help them and the refugees support Aceh Merdeka.'

'Talking' to the refugees

The next day I travel to Sigli, in Pidie district, where my confusion is to turn to terror.

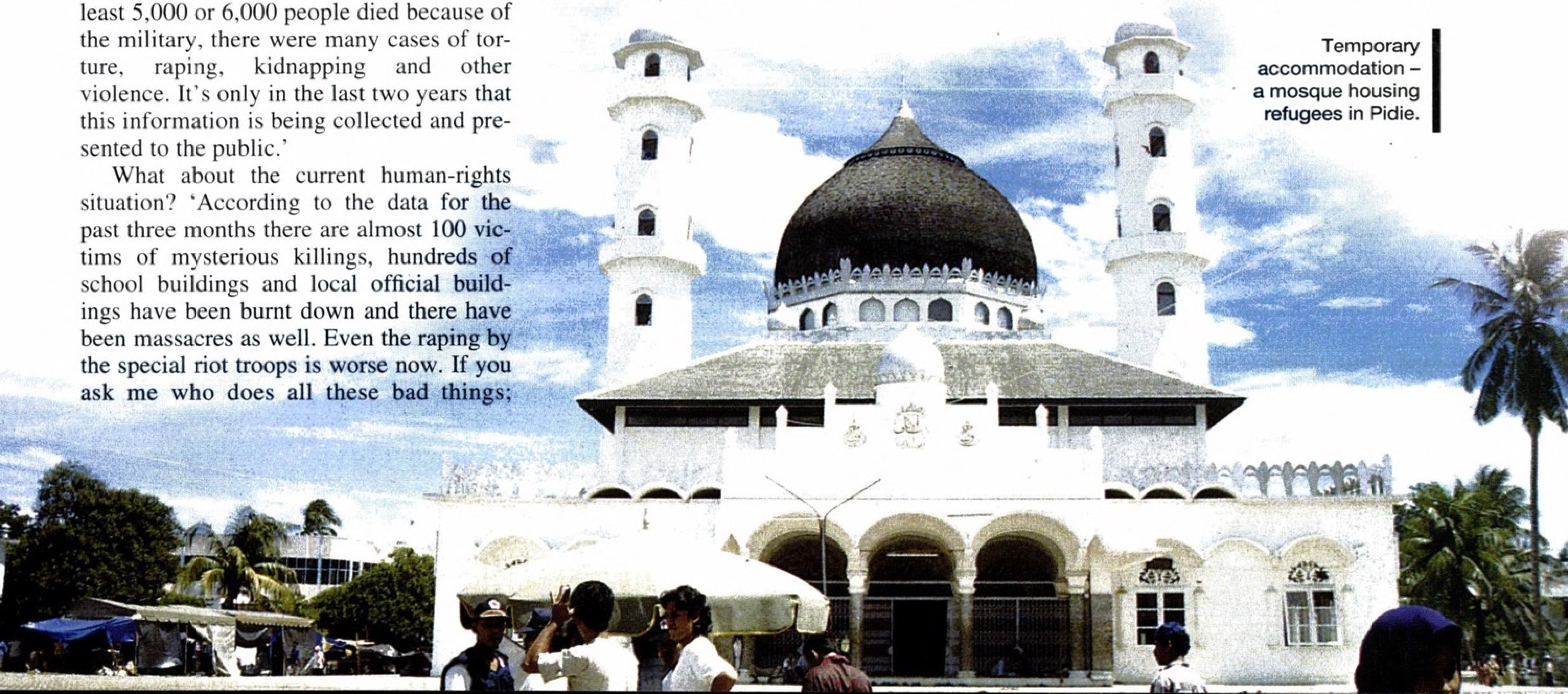
In Sigli care workers are getting ready to go to the refugee camps. It's a busy day – 28 babies have been born and there is much to do. But there is a delay – the military has set up a checkpoint and is questioning people leaving the town. 'We'll go soon but the back way,' says one female worker. 'Today we are going to play cat and mouse.'

So we leave, eventually, through the back roads and arrive at a refugee camp. People have crowded into a mosque and a few empty buildings while the most unlucky ones are sweating and shooing flies under tarpaulin shelters. As I walk towards the refugees to talk to them a large man with a badge approaches me and demands I sign in, and 'report all information that the refugees give to me directly'. Initially I think this is my first confrontation with the Indonesian Government. But no, this 'official' is from Aceh Merdeka. And so the farce begins...

Any attempts I make to talk to the refugees are stopped immediately by my Aceh Merdeka minders, mostly silencing the refugees with looks or occasionally a touch on the arm loaded with intimidation. The officials do not carry guns but these refugees, already traumatized by the military, are clearly terrified of their Aceh Merdeka minders as well.

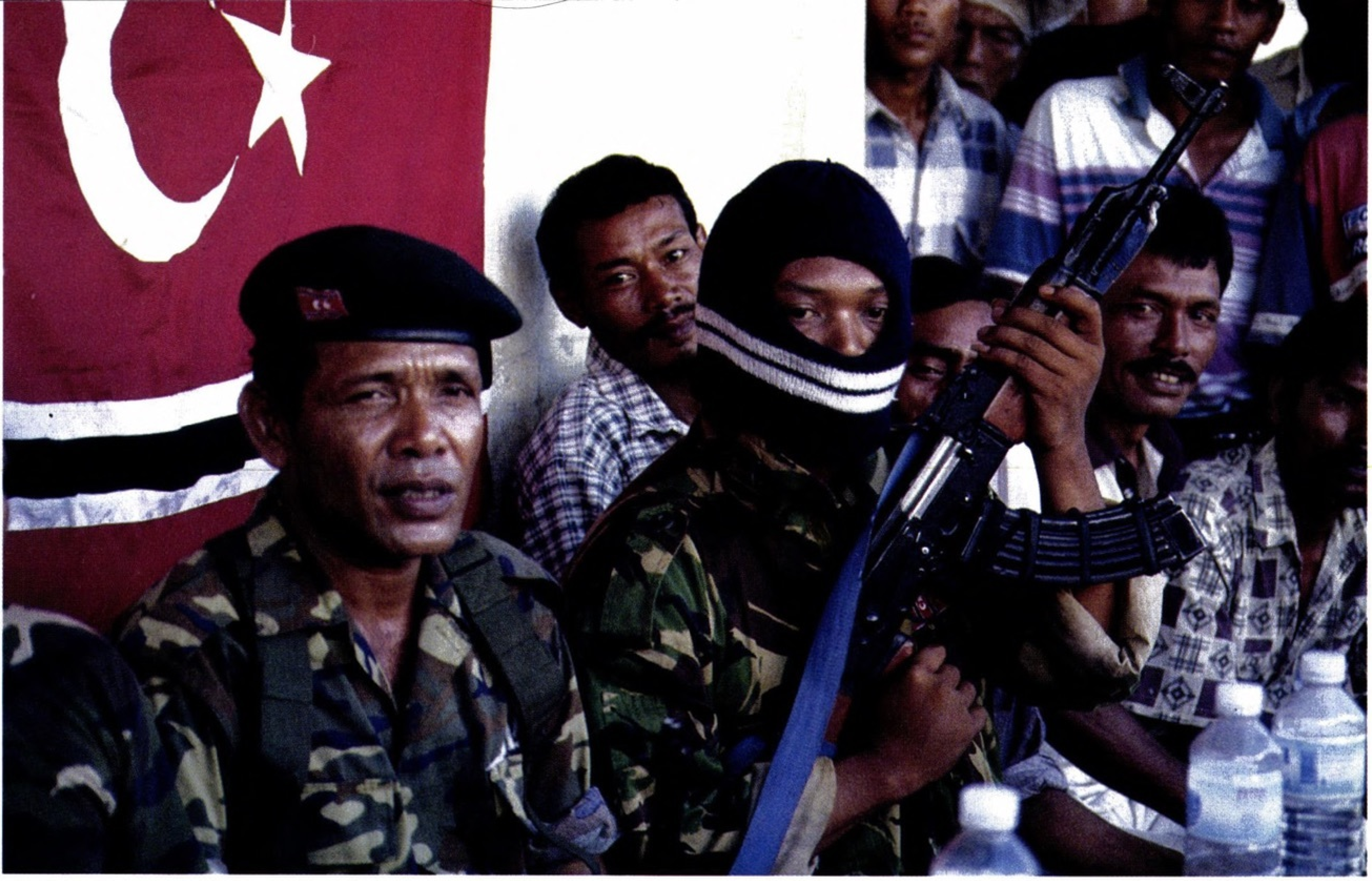
I am steered towards a woman under one of the tarpaulin shelters. The woman's eyes are stretched wide with fear. Nevertheless, she feigns enthusiasm about talking to us and repeats the answers to questions that the officials whisper in her ear. She is a good and trusted performer, unlike the hundreds of silent onlookers.

The heat is incredible – in these camps most deaths are due to heat exhaustion – and the stench of rubbish melting and festering in the sun makes me feel faint. Finally the stage-managed interview is over. My frustrated translator and I are ready to leave – we have seen enough. But we are presented with a group of women – 'Look, look, photo, photo!' say the officials – wearing white-and-red Aceh Merdeka T-shirts and headbands. 'Merdeka, Merdeka (Freedom, freedom),' they shout, raising



Temporary accommodation – a mosque housing refugees in Pidie.

ANOUK RIDE



JACQUELINE POWELL

Brutal bravado – Aceh Merdeka Field Commander Abdullah Syafi'i. (Below) Referendum campaigner Muhammed Nazar.

their clenched fists in the air. They are emotional, on the verge of tears and my stomach turns at the sight of their manipulation. Then just to make the performance even more obvious one official says 'Come on!' and hits the children on the legs so that they leap into the air and squeal 'Merdeka!'

I am taken to another camp, where they are obviously expecting me, as all the refugees are standing waiting under the shelter of the half-built mosque. Again, Aceh Merdeka officials lead the show. As I talk to one woman, a minder butts in and says: 'She doesn't speak Indonesian, only Acehnese.' The woman looks surprised at this statement; when asked a question she replies dutifully but in perfect Indonesian: 'I don't understand your question.'

The refugees will tell you the truth

The manipulation of the refugees is so obvious, so farcical, that by this stage it seems surreally humorous – until we reach the birthing centre. A young girl of around 15 years of age has been crying and is now at the stage where no sound can express her sorrow, where only her tear-weary restless eyes can portray what she is feeling. Beside her, under a mosquito net, is a tiny blue baby that has obviously been dead for some time. No-one has the courage to take it out of its bed and bury it. So young mother and baby sit suspended in death and despair.

They are trapped in Aceh Merdeka's public-relations war. In the past year Aceh Merdeka's power has grown but this has not been acknowledged by the outside world that continues to see the Indonesian military as the only significant perpetrators of terror. Aceh Merdeka has itself prompted refugee flows: these typically begin when Aceh Merdeka tells villagers that a military raid is imminent and organizes transport to the camps. The rebel group has taken over the refugee camps and 'pooled' the refugees' resources so they are left without the means to go back to the villages. It has then attempted to indoctrinate the refugees and now seeks to use them to present to the world Aceh Merdeka's view of the truth – that the military has created a refugee crisis, should withdraw from Aceh and allow it to be independent. In Aceh Merdeka's mind the UN and Western nations cannot ignore 100,000 refugees dying and sweltering in camps. So the refugees are being controlled, even created, and their image manipulated into a humanitarian plea for independence.

An Aceh Merdeka representative in the refugee camp explains: 'When the military goes back to Java then the refugees can go back. It is better that the refugees die here than go back to the villages when the military is there. Two people have died here this week. We are ready to wait a long time till our demands are met.'

I am presented with an ultimatum rather than an invitation to interview the Aceh Merdeka Field Commander. So, like the refugees, I comply, reluctantly getting on the back of a motorcycle that weaves its way through the jungle to his 'secret location'.

Commander Abdullah Syafi'i greets me theatrically, shaking hands with one hand while holding his gun with the other. When asked about Aceh Merdeka's human-rights abuses, he addresses the crowd that has assembled around us: 'Has anyone been killed by Aceh Merdeka? Has anyone been raped by Aceh Merdeka? Has anyone been harassed by Aceh Merdeka?'

They shout in unison: 'ABRI! (military!)'.

Commander Syafi'i continues: 'We are not forcing our people. The people of Aceh want their own nation; we have the ability to govern ourselves. It's a long time that our nation has been butchered; tens of thousands of people are victims of the military's human-rights abuses. It's a pretty big price to pay for the struggle for freedom, but we are proud like any other nation. We don't want to become children of colonialism. Aceh Merdeka is prepared for independence now. We have money, we have resources.'

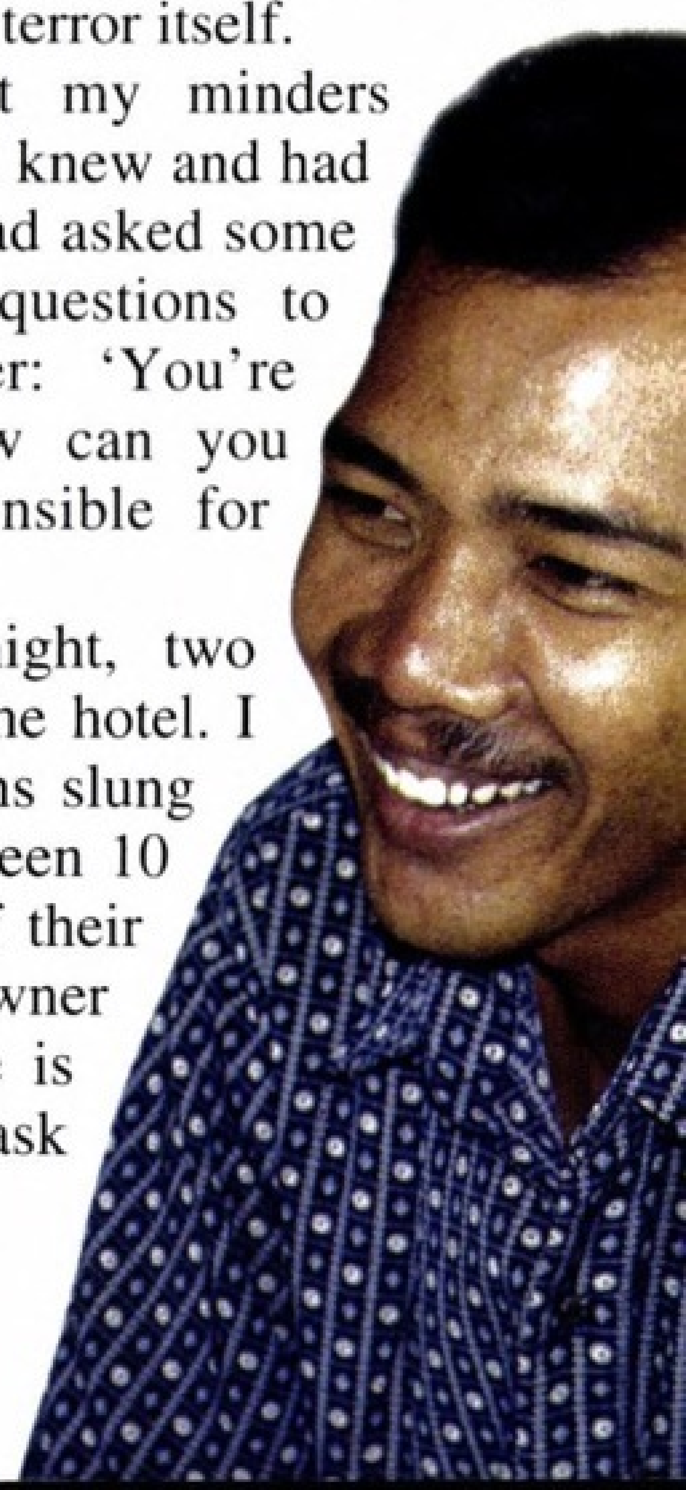
Commander Syafi'i sees no need for a referendum to give the Acehnese people a choice over their political future. The answer is simple: 'All the Acehnese people are Aceh Merdeka.'

That night, as a guest in an otherwise empty hotel, I try to digest the horror of what I have seen, of a refugee crisis being created and manipulated to gain the world's attention. All reports on Aceh concentrate on the Indonesian military's brutality and mention Aceh Merdeka only as the military's justification for terrorizing people – few of these reports present Aceh Merdeka as a source of terror itself.

I remembered that my minders seemed to sense what I knew and had become edgy. And I had asked some very straightforward questions to the Field Commander: 'You're obviously armed, how can you say you're not responsible for human-rights abuses?'

Shortly after midnight, two jeeps pull up outside the hotel. I hear the rattling of guns slung over shoulders as between 10 and 15 men get out of their vehicles. The hotel owner is woken up and there is much shouting as they ask

ANOUK RIDE



him questions about me.

When I hear the hotel owner walking to my room with rattling keys, the armed Aceh Merdeka men behind him, my heart seems to be constricted so I cannot breathe or move. There is only a wooden wall, door and large glass-shuttered window between me and a group of armed men in a town with no police or airport and in a room with no telephone.

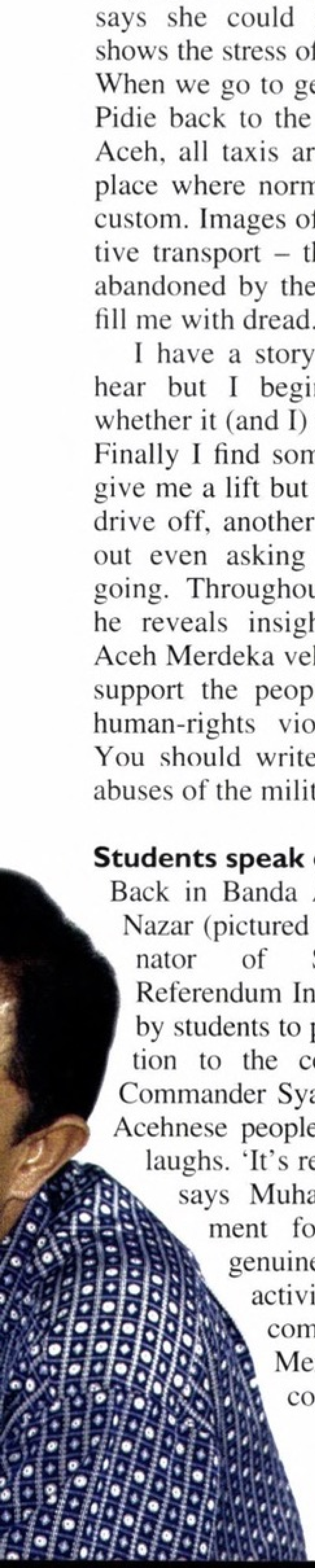
The key turns in the lock. Opening my eyes I realize the keys are opening not my door but the room next door. The men enter, turn the furniture over, hit the hotel owner and finally get into their cars and leave.

What did Aceh Merdeka want? To silence me? To take me hostage and further promote the cause? To give us a taste of the fear the refugees live with? They only achieved the last.

The next morning one of the care workers who had taken me to the camps and then recommended the hotel, berates me for staying in a hotel that was not 'safe'. She says she could not sleep all night and shows the stress of having been interrogated. When we go to get a taxi from the town of Pidie back to the provincial capital Banda Aceh, all taxis are mysteriously busy in a place where normally they are hungry for custom. Images of buses – the only alternative transport – that I had seen burnt and abandoned by the side of the road start to fill me with dread.

I have a story that the world needs to hear but I begin seriously to question whether it (and I) will ever get out of Aceh. Finally I find someone who is prepared to give me a lift but just as the car is about to drive off, another man jumps into it without even asking the driver where he is going. Throughout the hour-long journey he reveals insights such as: 'That's an Aceh Merdeka vehicle carrying weapons to support the people's struggle against the human-rights violations of the military. You should write about the human-rights abuses of the military.'

Students speak out



Back in Banda Aceh, I visit Muhammed Nazar (pictured left), the Central Co-ordinator of SIRA, the Acehnese Referendum Information Center – set up by students to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. I tell him what Commander Syafi'i had said, that 'all the Acehnese people are Aceh Merdeka'. He laughs. 'It's really important to realize,' says Muhammed, 'that the movement for a referendum is the genuine desire of student activists and youth as well as community workers. Aceh Merdeka is not us and our concept is different. They think they're fighting an ethnic war, but we're just working for democratization. There are only two groups influential now in Aceh – the student movement and Aceh Merdeka. The local and central governments do not have an influence any more with the people. I think we, SIRA, need to publicize the referendum amongst all the Acehnese and then we will empower our people to make a choice. Our action is for democracy and human rights – not for this war.'

Muhammed realizes that a referendum cannot be held till the conflict eases and people are free to make a choice. Given the need for the Indonesian military to withdraw from Aceh but the dangers of allowing Aceh Merdeka to fill the power vacuum, some form of third-party international intervention seems essential to stop the conflict. Indonesian military sources say Aceh Merdeka now has four times as many armed soldiers as in the early 1990s – though they still say the total is less than a thousand. Aceh Merdeka's forces are supported by weapons smuggled through Thailand and Malaysia from Cambodia; they are believed to be funded by entrepreneurs in Malaysia and southern Thailand as well as having received training and support from Libya.

But actually Aceh Merdeka's influence spreads far wider than these few hundred fighters – through the 'spies' that follow me from the moment I arrive to the informers that monitor what the Acehnese people say and do. The fact that no-one is able to attribute blame for the mysterious killings, the school-burnings and disappearances is in itself telling. Would you be able to speak out against Aceh Merdeka when you know it is listening in every village, street and office and when you know people who collaborate with the military authorities are liable to be found dead by the roadside? And even if you did stick your neck out, where would you turn – to the military whose treatment of the Acehnese has been at best patronizing and at worst deadly? To a West eager to rescue Christian East Timor while characterizing Aceh as a problem of Islamic fundamentalism?

'The refugees will tell you the truth.' And because they know the truth of what the military and Aceh Merdeka have done to them, the refugees are silenced. The events that fill their nightmares continue to be played out around them but to survive no-one dares remember out loud.

I was never allowed to speak openly with the refugees. But through the murk of Aceh's civil conflict, I have at least seen the truth about the refugees. It is in their eyes. In the depths of their pupils, the reddened whites, their earthy irises and twitching lashes, I saw what they could not say – a plea, a need, a desperate dream:

'We want to be free from fear.' ■

ACEH – a short history

ACEH has always been the most Islamic and independent area of Indonesia. As a sultanate, Aceh reached the peak of its powers under Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-36), who waged a war against the Portuguese to get them out of the Straits of Malacca that ultimately failed. Aceh sided with England to fend off the Dutch and a trade agreement with London has been used as evidence of an early Acehnese claim to statehood. The 500-year independence of the sultanate finally came to an end after 32 years spent fighting the Dutch. Even when the Dutch took over Aceh, occasional killings of the colonial authorities continued.

After the Second World War, Aceh joined the new independent Republic of Indonesia but quickly became disillusioned with the central Government which they saw as corrupt, exploitative and un-Islamic. Economic exploitation of Aceh's fossil fuels and forests, coupled with Suharto's transmigration policies, also became a grievance for the Acehnese. In 1977 rebel group Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh), led by local entrepreneur Hasan Di Tiro, proclaimed independence – though Di Tiro was later forced to flee to Sweden. In 1989, the scale of rebel activity and government attacks increased and during a military operation which lasted till 1992, 2,000 people were killed. Care Human Rights Forum lists around 1,300 civilian deaths, about 2,000 missing and 16,000 orphans; around 3,500 cases of torture, 130 rapes and 600 house burnings.

Suharto's fall gave the Acehnese the ability to begin a peaceful movement for a referendum demonstrated through banners and public meetings. The military, facing international and national condemnation for human-rights abuses and UN scrutiny in East Timor, loosened control in Aceh at first. But violence has worsened this year since April when Indonesian troops opened fire on a crowd, killing 45 people in Lloksemawe. Indonesian Minister of Defence and Security General Wiranto (who is also army commander-in-chief) has promised an investigation into human-rights violations – but only those since May 1998, the period after 'military operation status' had ended. This year's national elections in June could not be held in most districts because of the violence. After the elections, the military announced a new crackdown on Aceh Merdeka and began offensive operations using two battalions of locally based troops backed by 1,700 paramilitary police. More than 200 people have been killed so far this year. ■

Source: *Far Eastern Economic Review* 29 July 1999.

ACTION

'The refugee situation will get worse. There's an international focus on Tim Tim (East Timor). We need that focus too,' insists Afrizal.

Support peace and rehabilitation in Aceh. Contact:

- **ACFOA (Australia, details page 29)**
- **Tapol (Britain, details page 29)**
- **Human Rights Watch (US, details page 30).**

For more information:
www.aceh.org/forum

THE POLITICS

In June 1999 Indonesia had its first free election since 1955. The parliament is scheduled to elect a President in November this year.[1]

POLITICAL PARTIES (From highest to lowest number of votes)

DERMOT TATLOW / PANOS

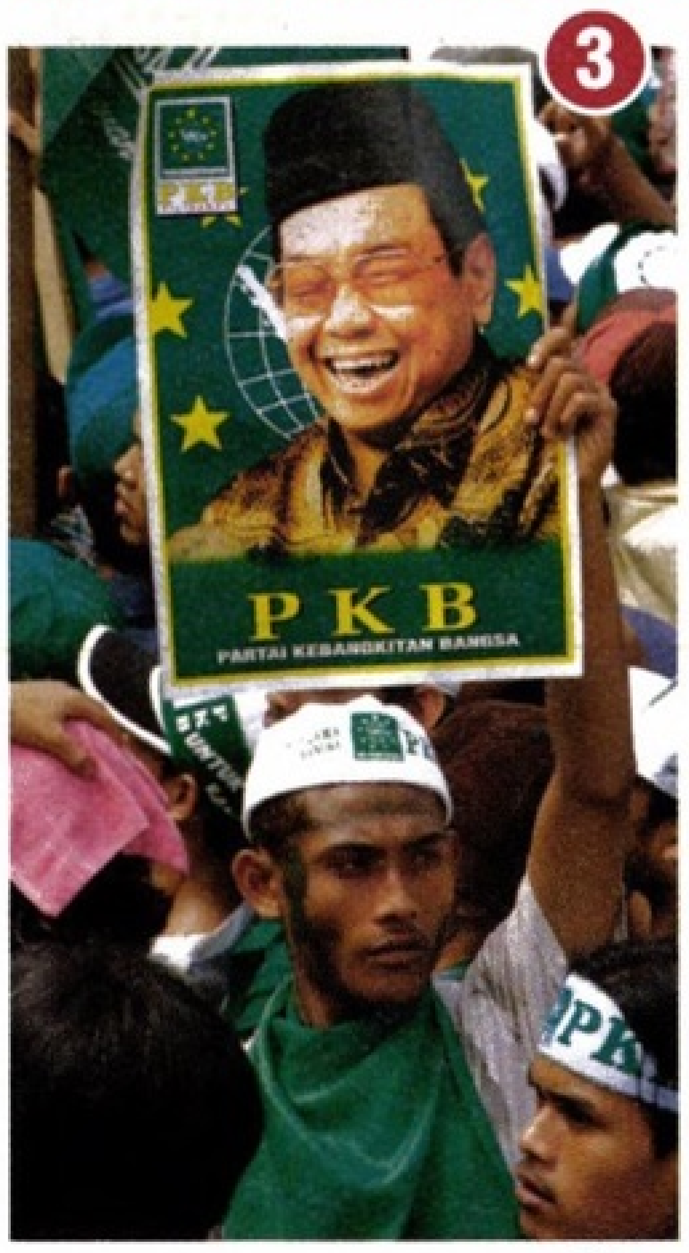
① Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan) PDI-P

Led by the daughter of former President Sukarno, Megawati Sukarnoputri, this party is nationalistic and pluralistic, embracing urban poor to Chinese business-people.

DERMOT TATLOW / PANOS

② Golongan Karya (Golkar)

Vehicle of corrupt former President Suharto, its presidential candidate is the current President BJ Habibie.



ADEK BERRY / AAP

③ National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkiktan Bangsa) PKB

Led by Abdurraham Wahid, head of Nahdlatil Ulama (the country's largest Muslim organization), the Party also draws support from Christians attracted by a moderate platform.

DERMOT TATLOW / PANOS

④ National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional) Amien Rais

Led by Amien Rais of the Muslim organization Muhammdiyah, the Party draws its support from students, intellectuals and the educated middle class.

MAIN PHOTO: FRED BAVEDEN / STILL PICTURES

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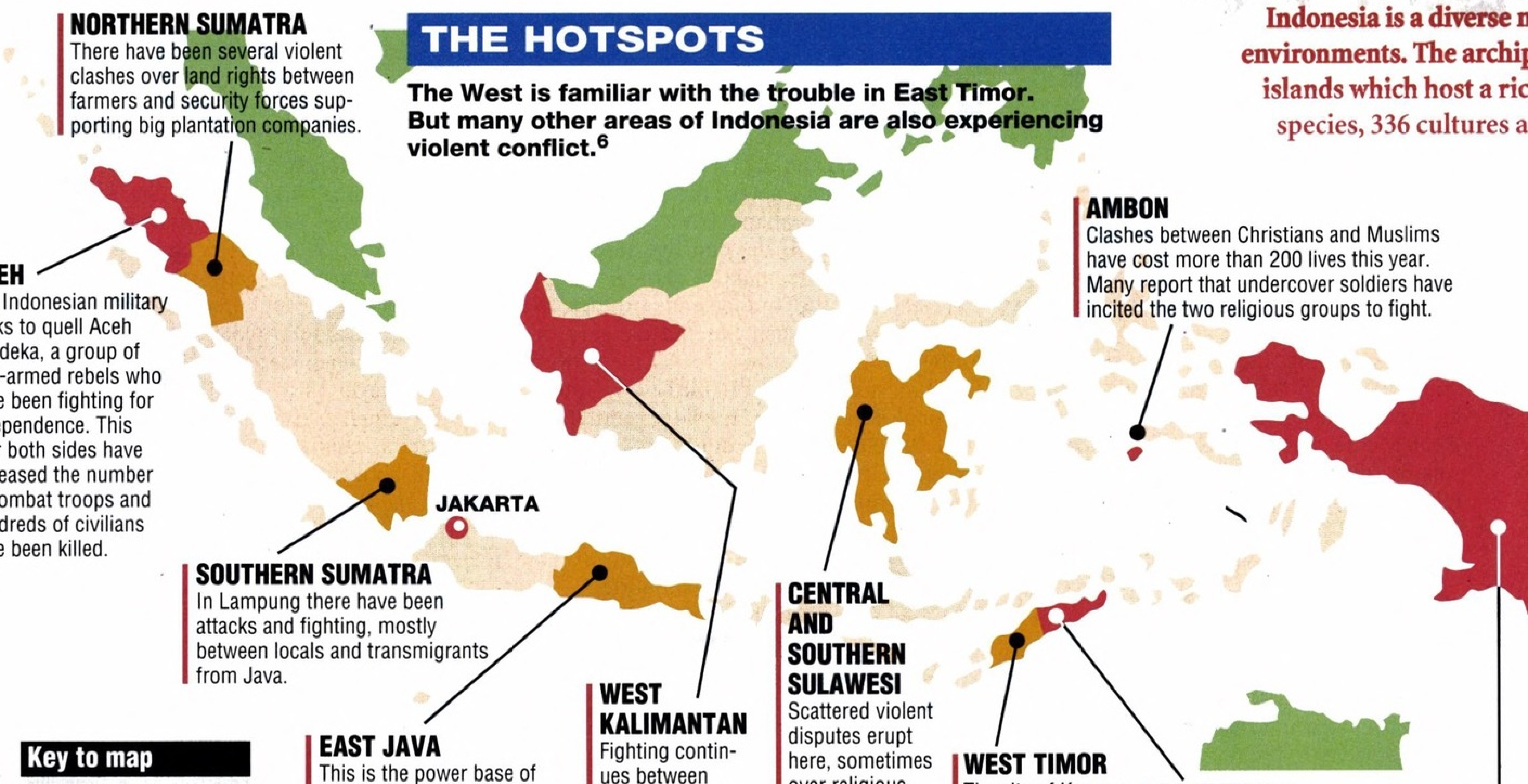
THE HOTSPOTS

The West is familiar with the trouble in East Timor. But many other areas of Indonesia are also experiencing violent conflict.[6]



NORTHERN SUMATRA
There have been several violent clashes over land rights between farmers and security forces supporting big plantation companies.

ACEH
The Indonesian military seeks to quell Aceh Merdeka, a group of well-armed rebels who have been fighting for independence. This year both sides have increased the number of combat troops and hundreds of civilians have been killed.

SOUTHERN SUMATRA
In Lampung there have been attacks and fighting, mostly between locals and transmigrants from Java.

AMBON
Clashes between Christians and Muslims have cost more than 200 lives this year. Many report that undercover soldiers have incited the two religious groups to fight.

Key to map

- 🟥 Bloody conflicts
- 🟧 Disputes that are prone to violence

EAST JAVA
This is the power base of Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, which suffered a string of bizarre murders in late 1998. The city of Surabaya is also a hotbed of labour protests.

WEST KALIMANTAN
Fighting continues between indigenous Dayak and the ethnically similar Malay people against Madurese migrants from the island of Madura. Around 200 people have been killed, most of them Madurese.

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN SULAWESI
Scattered violent disputes erupt here, sometimes over religious tensions and elsewhere due to local disputes over economic resources.

WEST TIMOR
The city of Kupang experienced clashes between the majority Christian and minority Muslim residents last year and the situation remains tense. East Timorese refugees and militias are involved in disturbances.

EAST TIMOR
Thousands were killed in the violence mostly perpetrated by pro-Indonesia militias around the time of the referendum in late August. The majority of Timorese voted for independence. An international peace-keeping force has been sent to East Timor.

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NESIA FACTS

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THE PEOPLE

POPULATION

◆ With 203.5 million people, Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country (after China, India and the US).

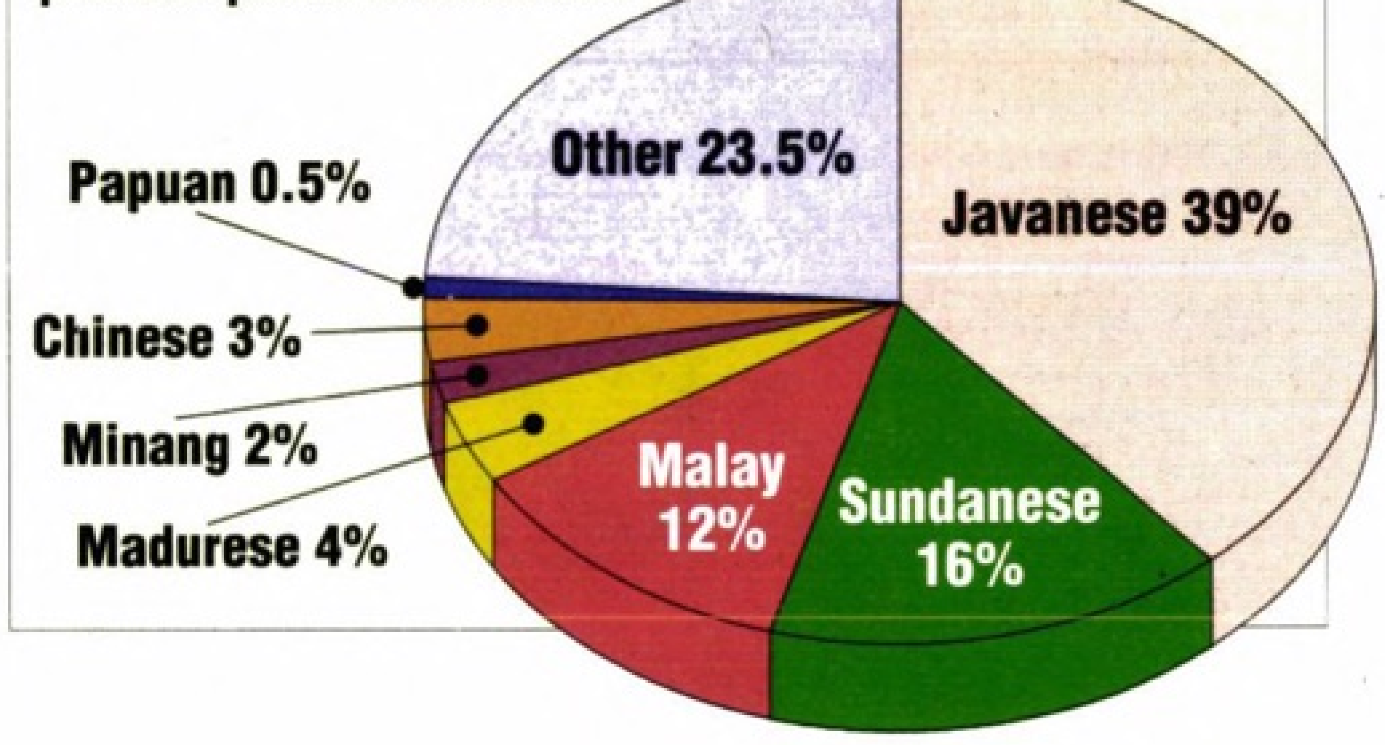
◆ Around 37% of the population now live in urban areas and the number of city-dwellers is increasing by 4.4% a year.

◆ The infant-mortality rate has fallen to 45 per 1,000 births (compared with 128 per 1,000 in 1960) and life expectancy has risen to 65 years, though progress on health has been derailed by the current economic crisis.[7]

◆ According to the Government's census, 87 per cent of the population is Muslim, 10 per cent are Christian and 3 per cent are Hindu and Buddhist. Indigenous religions were not presented as an option in the survey.[2]

Ethnicity

The Javanese people, comprising the largest ethnic group, hold most of the economic and political power in Indonesia.[2]



THE ECONOMY

The effects of the dramatic economic crisis which hit Asia in 1997-98 are now felt most strongly in Indonesia. Widespread corruption within Indonesia has compounded the problem.

CRISIS

◆ More than 100 million people, half the country's population, are living below the poverty line.

◆ Since mid-1997, the average annual per-capita income has plunged from $800 to $300.

◆ Even before the economic crisis, 40 per cent of Indonesians spent more than a fifth of their incomes on rice. In 1998, the cost of rice more than tripled.

◆ Six million people became unemployed in the last six months of 1997.

◆ Studies conducted in 1998 found that 65 per cent of children under three were anaemic – a 25-per-cent rise from 1997.

◆ Seven million primary and lower secondary school students quit school last year. In Jakarta falling enrolment has prompted closure of 81 state elementary schools.

◆ The number of street kids has tripled to between 30,000 and 40,000 in Jakarta.[3]

DISERUKAN KEPADA SELURUH RAKYAT INDONESIA
WASPADA TERHADAP
BAHAYA LATENT SOEHARTOISME

PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER

CORRUPTION

◆ When President Suharto resigned in May 1998, his family had significant interests in at least 1,251 companies in Indonesia.

◆ As the economic crisis hit in 1997, Suharto's daughter was planning to build a three-tiered above-ground transitway through Jakarta, his son an underground system, his other daughter a 95-kilometre bridge from Malaysia to Sumatra and his cousin the world's tallest tower in Jakarta. All projects would have been sponsored in some form by the Government.[4]

◆ The Suharto family controls some 3.6 million hectares of real estate in Indonesia – an area larger than Belgium – according to the *National Land Agency and Properti Indonesia* magazine. This includes 100,000 square metres of prime office space in Jakarta and nearly 40 per cent of East Timor.[5]

◆ When Suharto stepped down, his family had joint ventures with 66 Western, Japanese and Korean companies – including General Electric and Du Pont of the US, British Petroleum and Lloyds of London from the UK, Nestlé of Switzerland and Energy Equity of Australia.[4]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Indonesia ranks with Brazil as one of the most biologically rich countries in the world, despite occupying only 1.3% of the land's surface. Indonesia has a longer coastline than any other nation, reaching for 4,831 kilometres.[8]

INDONESIA'S environmental riches

- ✓ 515 species of mammals, the second most in the world
- ✓ 477 species of palms, the most in the world
- ✓ 1,519 species of birds, 17 per cent of the world's birds
- ✓ 411 species of reptiles

ROLAND SEITRE / STILL

INDONESIA'S environmental losses

- ✗ At the mid-1990s harvesting rate, loggers will deplete Indonesia's old-growth forests in another three decades
- ✗ Every year Indonesia loses a million hectares of forests – much of this occurs on the fragile outer-island ecosystems of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Sumatra and West Papua (Irian Jaya)[9]
- ✗ Coral reefs are being destroyed by use of explosives and poisons
- ✗ Fish and marine animals are threatened by widespread use of driftnets
- ✗ Indonesia has no Ministry for the Environment and one of the most lax systems for environmental protection in the world

PAULA BRONSTEIN /FRANK SPOONER

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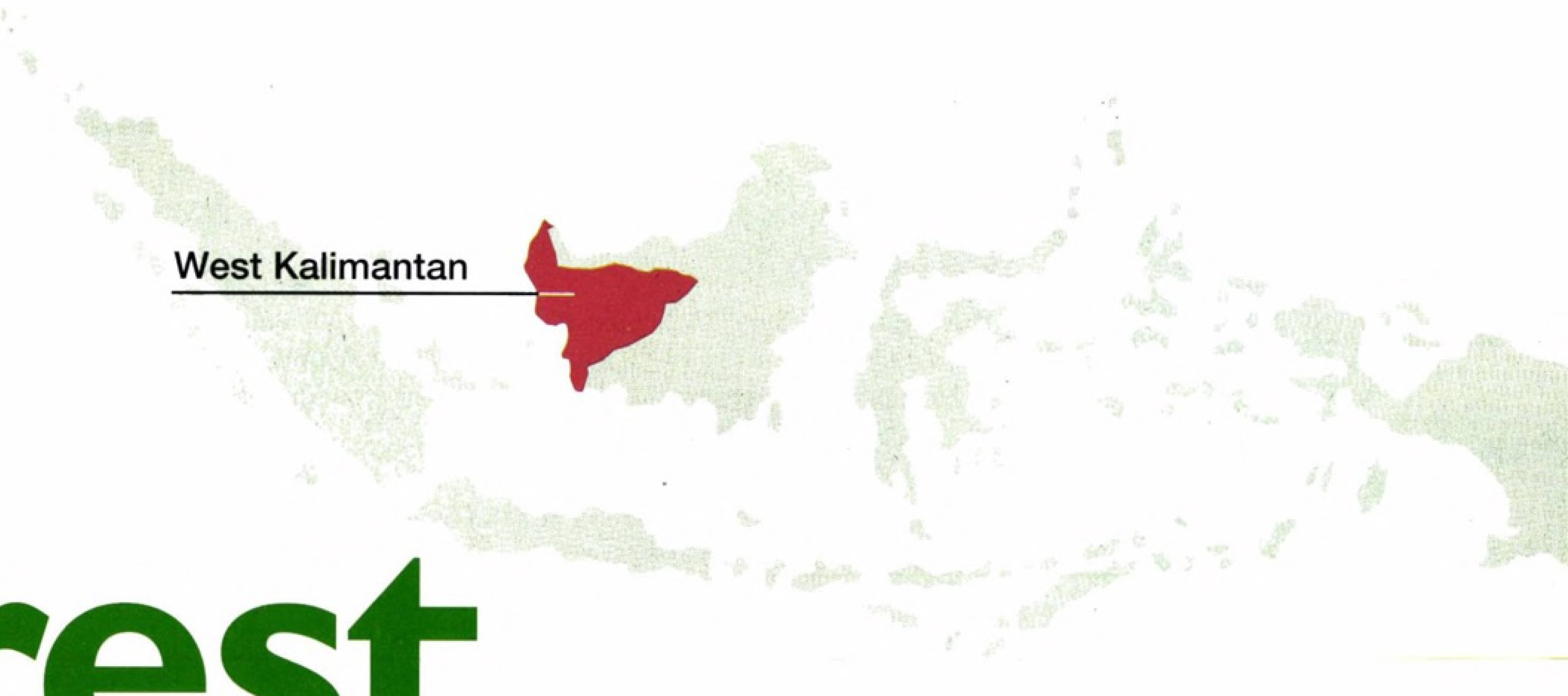
1 *Far Eastern Economic Review* 10 June 1998. 2 *Understanding Global Issues* 1998 No 1. 3 *Asiaweek* 18 June 1999. 4 Michael Backman, *Asian Eclipse: Exposing the Dark Side of Business in Asia* (John Wiley and Sons, 1999). 5 *Time* May 24 1999. 6 *The Age* Website www.theage.com.au/ 7 *The State of the World's Children 1999*, UNICEF. 8 Conservation International Website www.conservation.org/web/fieldact/regions/aspareg/indonesi.htm 9 Peter Dauvergne, 'Sawing Through the Economic Crisis,' *Amida* Vol 5 No 2.



Forest freedom

When I arrive in the city of Pontianak, where the Equator runs through the island of Borneo, I am struck by the laid-back gregariousness of the locals. As one resident explains: 'It's too hot to be too busy.' But looks are deceiving. Activists are slowly raising the temperature in the province of West Kalimantan. Here, where the Kapuas river meets the sea, there is a torrent of dissent as the indigenous Dayak people wrestle back their land rights.

'NO-ONE really questioned anything then,' says Pak Mejang, recalling the early 1980s. 'You would hear Dayaks saying the Government was good but the trend was poverty, an increase in the destruction of the environment and it wasn't safe for us.' Just about all the Dayak activists I speak to in the provincial capital, Pontianak, cite the gregarious Pak Mejang as their mentor – a source of encouragement, ideas, knowledge and advice. His support for all these young Dayak people is not just personal, it is pragmatic: 'Everyone, even the school teachers, used to say the Dayaks were stupid,' he laments. 'How could we get rid of this idea? We started by organizing ourselves and got our own schools, our own institutions. As we got together and talked, something became clear to us – we were trapped by a picture painted by outsiders who thought we were good as coolies, but not as bosses. I think this type of thinking was intentionally introduced for the use of Indonesian government officials so that they could control the Dayaks' natural resources.'

It worked. Much of West Kalimantan's forest is gone completely – it has been logged by Malaysian and Javanese companies, transformed into oil-palm plantations for the likes of Unilever and Suharto's corrupt cronies. If current trends continue, which in the wake of the economic crisis is almost certain, by 2018 there will be no products from the forest left to harvest in West Kalimantan. And all these rich outsiders are responsible for the forest fires which once again raged this year closing local airports and covering Pontianak in a smoky haze. John Bamba, a former student of Pak Mejang who now heads the Institute of Dayakology, comments: 'The plantations were responsible for the big forest fires of 1997. They clear land or start the forest fires intentionally when local people refuse to give up their land.'

The glamour of development threatens Dayak self-esteem – making Dayaks seem poor in comparison to the prosperous newcomers. But don't be fooled, says Pak Mejang: 'We did a study and found Dayak people weren't poor. If you multiplied the amount of Dayak land by how much rubber they could produce on it then Dayak people would be on a better salary than a government official!' he exclaims with glee. 'Poverty was just in their heads! We just have a system that is different from communism and different from capitalism. It is collective – we don't just live for ourselves, we live for other people. Capitalism divides the economy between the big and small and they don't care about the rest of the community and the land. We have our

Faces from the forest – Dayaks at a traditional funeral also mourn the loss of their land.

PAUL LOWE / MAGNUM

own ways here – like Java has its own ways – but the difference between us is that in Java the people have been empowered.'

Reformasi (political reformation) is just a word in most Dayak villages, explains Pak Mejang. 'The situation hasn't changed much since the fall of Suharto. For example, when Dayaks burned down the forest concession camp on 10 June this year there were 90 people arrested, beaten up and treated badly. People from my village went to speak to the corporation involved in the dispute. We wanted to engage in dialogue but we rejected the plan to take our land. And when we went to talk to the corporation, the military were there, the police were there, the government officials were there, the district head of government was there. We wanted a discussion. But what we got was this collection of people!' he says, astonished.

'So the people were cornered into an agreement. Many became angry and the brave ones burned down the camp. This is proof nothing's changed yet. Even though the military separated themselves from the police, it's obvious they are still policing incidents such as this.'

Faced with such a strong coalition of government, military and corporate power, it seems there is little that the Dayaks could do. But Ita Natalia, another activist encouraged by Pak Mejang to find ways out of this deadlock, says all is not lost.

She has maps. Huge maps that she sprawls across her lap, my lap, the coffee, the tape recorder, the floor. Anywhere they can be examined and referred to frequently. They are impressive in their size and painstakingly drawn by local Dayaks and mappers like Ita. But what's the point?

'In one case in Satu Desu,' she explains, 'there were demonstrations and negotiations involving Hutan Tanaman Industri, who brought the Governor to the village. The company wanted to present its case and say this programme will be good for the welfare of the community. But the community were waiting with banners. The banners said "WELCOME!". But they also said: "We reject Hutan Tanaman Industri".

'The Governor was shocked. The companies just said: "Why do you reject this plan?". The Dayaks got out their maps and said: "We already have a plan for this area of land. If you want to take the land you have to match our price and pay according to our numbers, not yours." And they didn't want to pay – the price was too high. In fact the Dayaks didn't want the money but suggesting a high price was a way to refuse the company. So this is a process and with this tool, the maps, they're not actually saying just "No" they can also say "because..."

'So that was a success story. There are also stories where communities have not been successful. But everything is practice in empowering communities.'

Budhi Wijardjo at the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation in Jakarta also hopes *reformasi* will include a system of law which can take land out of the clutches of corporations and put it back in the hands of indigenous people, farmers and the urban poor. 'The new government has not been finalized, but there are changes which are clear. First, the system is falling down. Second, we have a huge debt. Some say there is only one solution – exploiting natural resources. I think that we should return to traditional policies of how to use natural resources.' His office has several court cases under way in which locals are attempting to reclaim their land or fend off corporate encroachment.

Another way forward from corporate control backed by the military and the state may be a federation that would allow autonomy for resource-rich areas like West Kalimantan. Regional governments in Indonesia currently keep on average only 17 per cent of local taxes compared to 56 per cent in Malaysia and 43 per cent in Australia.[1] In Kalimantan all but two per cent of local government income goes to Java.

But it is not just a share of the economic revenue that Dayaks seek. 'A federal state is not an ideal solution,' says John Bamba, 'because the federal state is very strong in places like Malaysia for example. But at least for the present the federal model may be a good one for Indonesia.' His colleague Stephanous adds: 'In this issue we have a lot to discuss, we need a political discourse but right now there is no space for this, especially with the dual function of the military still in place. So I think we have to change the paradigms of the Government first.'

Pak Mejang is also sceptical: 'If I were faced with President Habibie, perhaps I would not say anything. Our rights are not owned by him, we have our own struggle. So far we've been given a little bit of freedom but our hands and feet are still tied. We know that local control or federation is not going to fall from the sky. We have to work for it.'

Is federation possible? 'Why not?!' he says with a smile and others in the room echo him: 'Why not?'

Stephanous cuts to the heart of things when he explains that the Dayak struggle is for survival of the spirit: 'Land to the Dayak people is a place of past, present and future generations and it is also home of their spirit. With all this cultural and social heritage, once they've lost their land, they've lost their sense of life. You cannot be a human being without that connection – the spirits of the ancestors and the present.' ■

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[1] *Far Eastern Economic Review* 21 January 1999.

Suffering without sympathy – the hated, hunted Madurese

HEAD-HUNTING, severed heads displayed by the roadside and wild rampages through villages. It is sensational but it actually happened in West Kalimantan. According to the indigenous Dayaks, the clashes with the Madurese migrants started when a Madurese killed or offended a Dayak. The Madurese refugees call the incidents the 'Dayak riots' which they say were sudden and barbaric. So far this year around 200 people have been killed in the conflict – almost all of them Madurese – and over 2,000 houses have been burned down.

Running from rage: Amina and her son Udi shelter in a sports stadium.

JACQUELINE POWELL

There are 25,000 Madurese refugees around Pontianak alone. In a sports stadium that serves as a refugee camp Amina (right) and her child Udi have been sleeping under a shed exposed to the wet and the heat, for four months. Her other child died of fever a month ago. It is a constant battle against illness, she says: 'The children get sick, then get better, then they get sick again and sometimes they die.' Out of around 200 people here, 50 have died and are buried at this stadium.

'This place is like a prison,' Amina goes on. 'There is hope of going home but I only want to go home if there is some sort of compromise. If this agreement does not come I would be too scared to go back.'

Despite the hardships, Amina can still manage to make a joke as she leads me around the stadium's running track: 'We will not get lost. I know this road well.'

It is not clear why the Madurese are a target of violence in West Kalimantan. The Madurese are not envied for their riches – most are excruciatingly poor. Yet in West Kalimantan, as all over Indonesia, they are hated. The most commonly held opinion of the Madurese is that they are rude and violent. They are told by other Indonesians that their plight is their own fault.

'I know how it all started,' says a refugee about the conflict in his village. 'I was there. A Madurese got on a bus and didn't have the money to pay the driver as he got off. A fight developed. By that night the problems had escalated. I had a brother who was Dayak who warned me and said "Leave your house; there's going to be trouble". I left immediately with my wife and children with only the clothes on our backs. As soon as we set foot out of the house, it was ablaze. I was so lucky to be warned.' ■

INDONESIA

WEST PAPUA

West Papua (Irian Jaya)

Breaking free from betrayal

DOMINIQUE CLARISSE / FRANK SPOONER

I become homesick when I arrive in Jayapura, the capital of West Papua, which bears a striking similarity to Queensland, Australia. But my nostalgia for home soon turns to disgust when I hear about West Papua's forgotten history. Because the nations where I have lived – Australia, Britain and the United States – have all betrayed the West Papuan people. And the international institutions in which I held hope have instead been hapless bystanders or even backers of military brutality.

'It's very easy to understand,' insists West Papuan leader Theys Eluay, 'This is what we want – independence.' It is also obvious that the locals in West Papua (officially known as Irian Jaya) have arrived at this conclusion themselves and, in stark contrast to Aceh, without propaganda wars and threats. This great slice of Papua, with 240 tribal groups, has involuntarily been Indonesia's easternmost province since they took the territory by force from the Dutch in 1961. Ever since then the military have controlled the province's resources and people using torture, rape, killings and land dispossession. Now, however, from the villages to the cities a grassroots movement for independence is spreading new shoots.

Zadrak Wamebu from the Institute for Irian Jaya Indigenous People Study and Empowerment agrees: 'There is now a self-confidence in people. There have been many demos to raise the flag and also on land rights. Recently hundreds of people carried the body of a victim of the military to their headquarters in Jayapura. This body was buried in front of the military headquarters, not in a cemetery, so that they are forced to acknowledge what they are doing. Every month someone is killed. If you look at things now, everyone's ready to face the military because we know too much. Before they just went along with it.'

People went along with it because they were never presented with an alternative. West Papua has been betrayed by the best of the West – by the US, the Netherlands, Britain, Australia, the world's biggest mining company and most recently, the Highland peoples believe, by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Ignored pleas

The US were the first to ignore the West Papuans. In 1962, they brokered a deal whereby the Dutch would leave the territory and transfer sovereignty to the United Nations until a local vote could be held for independence or integration with Indonesia. The West Papuans were not involved in these discussions and instead of the UN, Indonesia quietly took over administration of the province and repression began in earnest.

'We don't know why the US had to make that deal,' says Theys. 'We were already a nation, we had a culture, a flag, even an anthem. We already had freedom and rights as a nation. But we were never listened to. Why weren't we asked?'

Seven years later, in 1969, under the 'Act of Free Choice' Indonesia selected 1,025 West Papuans to be 'asked' whether they wanted independence. All elected for integration with Indonesia.

One of the few journalists there at the time (the world's media was focused on Indochina), Hugh Lunn, has written an account which records Papuans' heartfelt and ignored pleas to the outside world. On arriving at his hotel he found a letter soaked in blood which said Indonesia was killing dissenting Papuans. Then a Papuan who came into his room supposedly to repair a light mimed himself being shot in the back of the head while another pretended to be handcuffed. UN staff who spoke to Lunn off-the-record had all experienced but not publicized similar creative requests for international support.[1]

Australia also ignored such pleas. At the request of Indonesia, it arrested two pro-independence activists when they entered Australian-administered Papua New Guinea. They carried testimonies from Papuans calling for independence and for the UN to abandon the Act of Free Choice. These were never delivered – instead the activists were put in jail.

ANOUK RIDE

Market madness – women sell local produce in Jayapura while the Government sell their land in Jakarta.

A statement prepared by the US Embassy in Jakarta and presented to Australia before the UN-supervised vote says: 'Personal political views of the UN team are... 95 per cent of Irianese (West Papuans) support the independence movement and that the Act of Free Choice is a mockery.'[2]

This new evidence confirms that the UN, Australia and the US all knew that the Act of Free Choice was actually what Papuans call the 'Act of No Choice'. The duplicity is incomprehensible to most Papuans – the UN had embraced many new nations; the US, in its anti-Communist crusade, avowed support for freedom and Australia followed suit. But all these promises and pronouncements were void when it came to their own oppression.

After West Papua was officially proclaimed Indonesian, the small rebel group, Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM or Free Papua Movement) although armed only with bows, arrows and spears, provided the Indonesian military with a rationale to clamp down on the province. An estimated 60,000 troops were deployed. From 1967 to 1972 the military violence is estimated to have caused between 30,000 and 100,000 Papuan deaths. Then, in the late 1970s, a series of ceremonies raising the West Papuan flag in the Highlands resulted in the military bombing and strafing of whole villages, killing at least 1,000 people and causing at least 5,000 to flee and hide out in the forest.

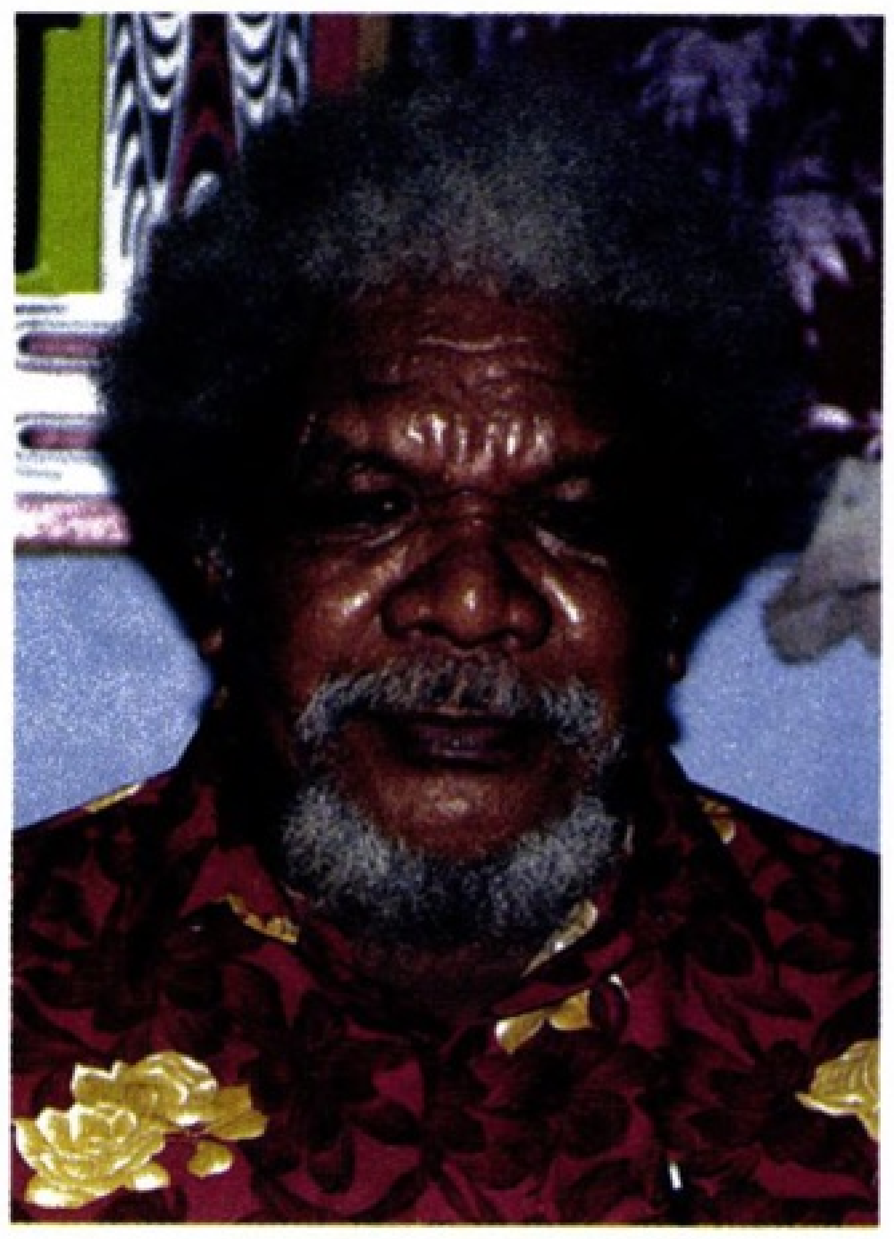
According to Denny Yomaki, from the Irian Jaya Environment Foundation, the OPM is not a real threat but an excuse for military occupation. He says locals found groups of fake OPM on the border who have better weapons and who also have crates of Indonesian-brand beer and whisky delivered once a month. This stands in stark contrast to the 'real' OPM as Denny explains: 'Some of the OPM fighters in the forest have been fighting for 30 years now and they are isolated – they have never seen cars or TVs or whatever. In the forest, the only way people can think is to fight with bows and arrows and whatever they have.'

Western silence over continuing human-rights abuses was ensured once they became intimately involved in Indonesia's great land grab. West Papua may be the most profitable real estate Indonesia owns – mainly due to its rich mineral resources. The chief mining enterprise is the world's largest copper and gold mine run by the American company Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold. The Indonesian government has a nine-per-cent stake in the mine. Another major profiteer is British mining giant Rio Tinto which owns nearly 15 per cent of Freeport's share capital, producing around $150 million for Rio Tinto in 1998. All that the West Papuans will get from this huge enterprise is a scarred environment – Freeport now dumps 70 million tonnes of tailings a year into the Ajikwa river and will leave behind a 230-square-kilometre scar in the jungle when the mine closes in 30 years' time.[3]

'We have been spectators not participants in development,' laments Theys Eluay. 'Java's too crowded and they see Papua as a way to feed themselves. Without us they will starve.'

Capturing the world's attention

After years fighting a war largely unknown to the outside world, in January 1996 the OPM resorted to desperate measures to get their demands heard. They took hostages: scientists from Britain's Cambridge University, the Jakarta Biological Science Club and the World



West Papuan leader Theys Eluay.

ANOUK RIDE

Wide Fund for Nature, their assistants and local people from the district of Mapnduma. Eleven were released within the first two weeks but four British, two Dutch and five Indonesian citizens remained hostages. OPM leader Kelly Kwalik says: 'We took the researchers hostage because we had no other way for our cause to be acknowledged.'[4]

The ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) had a solid relationship with the people of Mapnduma district. So it was natural that they became involved in attempting to reach an agreement to release the hostages. By early May it seemed that they had reached an understanding. A ceremonial feast to celebrate the release of the hostages and International Red Cross Day was scheduled for 8 May in Nggeselema village.

Yet the OPM cancelled the release of the hostages: they felt the ICRC had broken their agreement by failing to bring official representatives of the English, Dutch, German and Indonesian governments to Nggeselema.[5]

'Even though we wear penis gourds and torn shirts we have the brains God gave to us all,' said Kwalik. He was angry and announced that the hostages were not going to be released yet, but he did not threaten their lives. He also asked: 'Is this really the Red Cross or people disguised as the Red Cross?'[4] Kwalik was convinced that when they gave back the hostages they would be attacked by the Indonesian military. The next morning on 9 May Sylvianne Bonadei, the ICRC staff member who dealt most closely with the local people and the OPM, visited Nggeselema. It was agreed the ICRC would return three days later and it was clear that negotiations were not closed.[4]

At 3:00pm a helicopter with the logo and flag of the ICRC landed in Nggeselema village. As always when it arrived, locals approached the helicopter to welcome the medical staff. But the four white passengers (one of whom some eyewitnesses claim looked like Bonadei) fired into the crowd, the church and the clinic, killing two civilians. Five military choppers that had followed behind the ICRC helicopter then conducted an aerial bombardment that razed the village and left twelve people dead.[5]

At the same time as the attack, the ICRC announced its resignation as negotiator at a press conference at the Sheraton Hotel in Timika.[5] The local people in Nggesselema had no way of knowing that their attackers were imposters.

Sylvianne Bonadei firmly denies she was on that helicopter of killers – and the other ICRC staff were put on a plane to Jakarta that same day. The ICRC is investigating who might have impersonated their staff and used their symbol and equipment. Bonadei says: 'If the emblem has been violated... it was our only powerful means of getting into that place and get the trust from these people, so how can they possibly trust us again?'[4]

So who were the white attackers? Residents of Keneyam – a village used as a military base during the hostage crisis – have testified that 16 white people wearing army camouflage arrived in their village on 8 May 1996, the day before the attack.[5]

Britain appointed Military Attaché and SAS veteran Colonel Ivor Helberg to provide specialized assistance and advice to Indonesia's General Prabowo during the hostage crisis. He says he had a team of police hostage experts working with him but others claim these men were actually the élite English military unit, the SAS. Ivor Helberg himself says: 'I cannot imagine that either the Indonesian Government or Her Majesty's Government... would allow some third party, mercenary organization to actually execute the kind of operation on our behalf. I mean, can you imagine if it all went wrong? It would be horrendous, wouldn't it? What would the parents [of the hostages] think and that sort of thing?'[4]

Nick van den Bergh of the mercenary group Executive Outcomes (EO) has said that he led a team of five people in the Mapnduma area in 1996. The team worked as technical advisors and trainers for helicopter attack teams. He has also confirmed the participation of members of the SAS but denies that his EO troops were involved in the attack on Nggeselema.[1] It has not been verified whether the white soldiers who undertook the attack were SAS, police working with Helberg, Executive Outcomes soldiers, or a combination of all three.

Screams not heard

Meanwhile the violence and fear continues. This and last year, for example, independence rallies in early July resulted in the military firing on unarmed protesters, killing over 20 people and wounding over 100. Amidst the clamour surrounding East Timor, the military presence here has continued without comment. Military Head General Wiranto has made moves to strengthen rather than relax Indonesia's grip – including proposals to legislate a state of emergency.

Some hopes for a political solution have been raised by a national dialogue on the province under President Habibie. Representatives from all over the territory have told Habibie they want independence. Indigenous activist Zadrak Wamebu thinks that Habibie is a better person than Suharto but: 'Habibie doesn't have control over what the military does. There's still people dying. The military is supposed to be just used in an emergency. There's so many armed forces here and there's no need. If there's an emergency, civilians can join the army and sort it out.' He adds with bright-eyed enthusiasm: 'I'll join the army!' Then pauses for a moment: 'But, no, I wouldn't join it because I'm anti-violence.'

Zadrak ponders what an independent West Papua would be like: 'It's hard to say. A system would have to consider all tribes. It would be dangerous if they took on a similar system to Suharto. If there were one tribe that controlled all the others.' He adds teasingly: 'Well, except if they were my friends...'

But he is certain about one thing: 'The political system and the political culture which we've experienced have supported terror not freedom. We need a situation where people are sharing, where you have to listen and respect what your elders give you. We need to be in a different world where it's not seen that some people have to be out in front of the rest.' ■

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1 Hugh Lunn, 'How the West was lost' *The Weekend Australian* 21-22 August 1999. **2** *Sydney Morning Herald* 26 August 1999. **3** World Development Movement. **4** Australian Broadcasting Corporation Website. **5** Press Release *Military Operation for the Release of Hostages and Human Rights Violations In the Central Highlands of Irian Jaya: Unveiling the Mystery of the Bloody ICRC Mission, The Involvement of Foreign Soldiers and the Indonesian Army*, signed by Johanes Bonay, SH (Director IHRSTAD), Herman Saud (Christian Evangelical Church in Irian Jaya), Mgr Leo Laba Ladjar (Bishop of Jayapura), Rev Benny Giay, PhD (Research and Development, Christian Missionary Alliance of Indonesia, Jayapura) 25 August 1999.

ACTION

'It is sure that Indonesia will not give us permission for freedom so we appeal to people outside Indonesia to the international community, to the UN so other nations can join us and assist us.' West Papuan leader Theys Eluay.

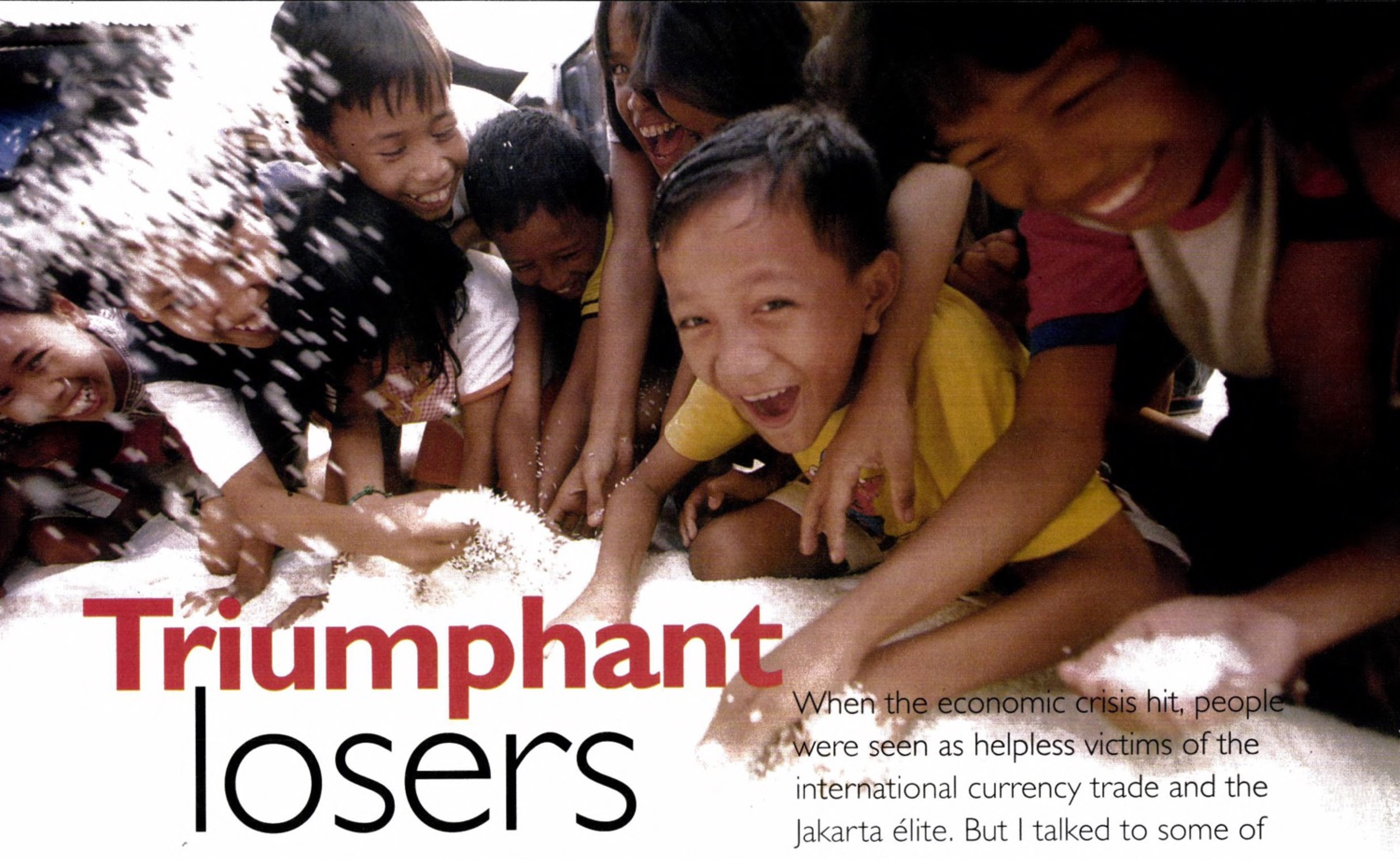
Contact these organizations:

Australian West Papuan Association (Sydney) PO Box 65, Millers Point, NSW 2000. Tel: +61 2 9552 6022. Fax: +61 2 9960 1698. E-mail: iris@mantra.com.au

Survival International, 11-15 Emerald St, London WC1 N3QL England. Tel: +44 171 242 1441. Fax: +44 171 242 1771. E-mail: survival@gn.apc.org

Down to Earth (see page 29).

For more information:
www.cs.utexas.edu/users/cline/papua/



PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER

Triumphant losers

When the economic crisis hit, people were seen as helpless victims of the international currency trade and the Jakarta élite. But I talked to some of these 'losers' who have managed to shame the World Bank, expose systematic government corruption and now create their own social safety net.

At the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) where poor Jakartans have gathered the mood is raucous and welcoming. When I ask how the economic crisis has changed their lives, they joke; 'How long have you got?' Each person has a story of suffering but also of hope, as one woman explains: 'Before I was a seller but with the crisis there was no money, prices went up and I struggled to find food. My son had to stop school. Those who had *sembako* (basic food/needs) closed their doors or fled the *kampung* (village). Then the rest of us got together and began our struggle as one. We even demonstrated. Before I was scared of demos, I thought they were only for the students and clever people. I was shy. Now I am not. I am demonstrating against Habibie and corruption and for the empowerment of the poor.'

It was when the economic crisis hit that people started to rise up against Suharto simply because they had nothing to lose. According to government statistics, more than half the population now lives below the official poverty line. But this data does not include poor people without addresses, says Wardah Hafidz, co-ordinator of the UPC: 'Actually they are the real poor.'

Wardah has been working with these 'real' poor despite death threats, the protest of her neighbours and the occasional bricks thrown through her window. But it is not just the Government and her neighbours in East Jakarta who disapprove. She has also had heated face-to-face meetings with the World Bank. As she once told Bappenas (the Indonesian planning agency) when trying to get into their office: 'You can meet 40 of us in your office or you can have 4,000 of us on the street.' They let her in.

When the economy crashed, the World Bank and Bappenas were supposed to come to the rescue with the Social Safety Net Programme (SSN). 'The original policy was that the SSN was to be exemplary,' Wardah explains. 'It was supposed to be open to the people, they were to know how much money is to be used in what area. But this didn't happen at all.

'We began to collect data about what happened to this money. We checked the data with *kampung* (village) people. Do you know anything about this SSN money? No. Were you informed about it? No. Do you know how much money has been allocated for your *kampung*? No.

'So we said "OK, this is the information we have about where the money was supposed to go. Look around in your village and find out who has it." So they went back to the village and found out lots had not been delivered. In the 1998-99 fiscal year the allocation of the SSN budget was 17.8 billion *rupiah* (over $2 billion dollars). Eight billion ($1 billion) is already missing. The other nine billion (over $1 billion) is for just five programmes, and I would say that around 60 per cent of that is corrupted. So this SSN is really a fiasco. Only about 20 per cent of the money reached the people.

'Because of all the problems with the programme, we asked that they hold the money and not spread it until the corruption was taken care of. Bappenas said: "Yes, there are problems but we have done nothing to encourage them." We were very disappointed. The Government is rich. They say they care about the poor but don't have the resources to do anything about it.'

'We went to the World Bank in March with 10,000 signatures from the *kampungs* saying "Stop the SSN"'.

The UPC also issued a statement which read: 'As long as the programme is handled by the same institutions, bureaucracy and people, corruption, collusion and nepotism will continue... We are already poor, don't increase our load with a growing debt.'

Wardah says she watched Mark Baird, director of World Bank in Indonesia and other officials walk among the people in the *kampungs*, the slums and the factories who told them the SSN had not helped. She says incredulously: 'But still they decided to disperse the money by the end of June with conditions that were very easy for the Government to fulfil. It's really frustrating!'

Some of the SSN resources were reportedly used for campaigning by the Government's party Golkar during the elections. Meanwhile the poor looked around for other sources of funds, says Wardah. 'They said: "why don't we start saving together?"' Local groups pooled savings and handed out loans for businesses and training. Wardah says this has been successful: 'In this way we are trying to cope independently with the crisis.' ■

DAVID RANSOM

We will not be crushed

East Timorese Nobel Peace Prize Winner JOSÉ RAMOS HORTA issues a heartfelt plea on behalf of his native country.

ON 30 AUGUST I was in Australia with many native East Timorese from around the world. We had all gathered to wait for the results of the vote on the future of East Timor after many hundred of years of Portuguese colonial rule and 23 years of Indonesian occupation.

I was following the news; there was tremendous media coverage – over 100 journalists had been covering live, 24 hours, the democratic exercise. And we saw thousands and thousands of East Timorese, hundreds hungry and illiterate, emerging from the forests, coming out of their homes, walking for hours on end, barefoot, towards the United Nations ballot where they queued up for hours. By the end of the day almost 100 per cent of eligible voters had cast their ballot in a beautiful example of courage and democracy.

Despite all the violence for weeks, that day almost all the eligible voters had gone to vote. It was the greatest joy of my life – to see how the people knew their rights; how they knew the meaning and implication of that particular vote. The future of their country was in their hands.

Almost 80 per cent voted for independence – in spite of the terror. However the moment of triumph, that triumph of courage and democracy, was soon soaked in blood. The Indonesian army and all the people in the Special Forces – the two most bloody, most violent, most arrogant factions of the Indonesian military – orchestrated this campaign of destruction.

I had warned about this happening. I had written to the Secretary General about this potential for violence.

What's most frustrating is how the media keeps reporting that this is militia violence. More than half of the militias' personnel are not even natives of East Timor. They are groups from outside – frustrated, unemployed, marginalized elements of society who have been prepared and organized by the Indonesian army. The East Timorese who have joined the militias have done so because it was a way for them to save their lives. But to prove their loyalty to Indonesia those East Timorese who have joined the militias have often been forced to kill their own families.

I was on the phone a few hours ago with contacts who remain in East Timor. What they have seen there is unbelievable. Villages have been burned to the ground. There are over 200,000 internally displaced persons wandering around the countryside. There have been over 200,000 people who have been actively removed from their homes and taken against their will to Indonesia.

Fortunately the pictures that have come back from this conflict have shaken the world. What can the world community do? First and foremost we are extremely worried about the tens of thousands of people who are out of food. The country is thoroughly destroyed; it reminds me of pictures of World War Two, in Dresden or London.

I urge each of you to call upon your respective governments to stop sending weapons to Indonesia and all dictatorships around the world. I urge each of you to call on your governments to open a war crimes tribunal on Indonesia. We do not want revenge. We just want those who are guilty of war crimes against humanity to be brought to justice. For the sake of those who were murdered. For the sake of those were burnt to death in their houses. All over the world, we must strive to bring to justice those Indonesian ministers and political leaders who for the past 23 years have executed this crime against a small nation.

I would like to thank everyone, on behalf of East Timor, for bearing the torch that now guides us. It is the flame that we will follow to the first stage of our independence. We will not be crushed. We will prevail and rebuild our country from ashes. ■

José Ramos Horta

This statement was first made to a conference, 'Awakening: inspiring a radical shift in our thinking, values and lifestyles' organized by World Voices, a coalition of young people who have come together from countries around the world. For more information see: www.worldvoices.org/

ACTION for East Timor

Support peace and reconstruction in East Timor. Contact the following organizations:

AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND
Free East Timor Coalition, Box 68-419, Newton, Auckland.
Tel/Fax: +64 9 849 3890. E-mail: marie@clear.net.nz

AUSTRALIA
Australian Coalition for a Free East Timor, 11 Wolseley Road, Mosman, Sydney, NSW 2008. Fax +61 2 9960 5550.
E-mail: skouwe10@scu.edu.au
East Timor International Support Center, PO Box 651, Nightcliff, Darwin NT 0814.
Tel: +61 8 8948 4458. Fax: +61 8 8948 4498.
E-mail: info@easttimor.com
Website: www.easttimor.com/
Free Timor Coalition Campaign Office, Trades Hall 54 Victoria Street, Carlton, VIC.
Tel: +61 3 9639 7688
Website: www.freetimor.com/
Campaign for an Independent East Timor, c/o Development Education Centre, 1st floor, Torrens House, 220 Victoria Square, Adelaide, SA 5000.
Tel: +61 8 8205 3259 or +61 8 8371 0480.
Fax: +61 8 8223 6509.
E-mail: andyalcock@bigpond.com
East Timor Human Rights Centre, PO Box 1413, Collingwood, VIC 3066. Tel: +61 3 9415 8225. Fax: +61 3 9415 8218. E-mail: ethrc@minihub.org Website: http://law.murdoch.edu.au/minihub/ethrc/

Urgent Appeal: Mèdecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders has sent staff to West Timor to help the refugees. They want to send more staff and medical supplies to Timorese in the West and East. To make a donation to their humanitarian work call: +61 2 9552 4933. Fax: +61 29 552 6539. E-mail: office@sydney.msf.org or post to: Reply Paid 31, MSF Australia, PO Box 847, Broadway, NSW 2007.

BRITAIN
Catholic Institute for International Relations, Unit 3 Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road London N1 7BJ. Tel: +44 171 354 0883. Fax: +44 171 359 0017. E-mail: cathy@ciir.org Website: www.ciir.org
British Coalition for East Timor, PO Box 2349, London E1 3HX. Tel/Fax: +44 181 985 1127. E-mail: bcet@greennet.apc.org bcet@gn.apc.org
Website: www.gn.apc.org/bcet/bcet.htm

CANADA
National East Timor Action Network (see page 30).
Parliamentarians for East Timor (PET) Suite 116, 5929-L Jeanne D'Arc Blvd., Orleans, ON K1C 7K2. Tel: +1 613 822 1227. Fax: +1 613 834 2021. E-mail: pet@web.net

UNITED STATES
East Timor Action Network, Washington Office, 110 Maryland Ave, NB Box 30, Washington DC 20002. Tel: +1 202 544 6911. Fax: +1 202 544 6118. E-mail: etande@igc.org etanko@igc.org
Website: www.etan.org

Green light to the generals

The West was wilfully blind to the Indonesian army's rampage through East Timor till it was far too late, argues **Anouk Ride**.

Reflections of resistance – the world through the eyes of an East Timorese independence supporter.

CHARLES DHARAPAK / AAP

THE East Timorese vote for independence under a United Nations-supervised ballot is a great achievement for a long-suffering and brave people. But the referendum process was one of the worst mistakes the UN and the West have ever made.

Why? First, the agreement for a referendum was signed by the UN with an illegitimate authority – President Habibie's Government, which was only tolerated by the Indonesian public as a temporary measure until a free election could be held.

There was no consultation with the democratic political parties that had sprung up to contest the free elections in June, despite the fact that the results of the East Timorese referendum need ratification by the newly elected parliament. Megawati Sukarnoputri, leader of the most popular party, attacked Habibie's decision to hold the referendum as unlawful.

Labour activist Dita Sari (featured on page 11) who has also campaigned for a free East Timor, says that the vote for independence came as a shock to Indonesians: 'Many people were very angry when the results were announced. For years, the Indonesian people have been told that in 1975, East Timor was in danger of falling into the clutches of the communists. They were also led to believe that Indonesia was in East Timor because the East Timorese asked to be integrated into Indonesia. This distortion of history is still very strongly embedded in the minds of most people. Now the Indonesian press has reported in great detail on the international reaction to the events. This has helped break up old prejudices about how well Indonesia has treated East Timor.'

But, says Dita, it has not helped strengthen opposition to the military: 'People see it as involving the loss of part of Indonesia's territory and blame Habibie for suggesting that a referendum should be held. It's all his fault. They are not blaming the armed forces.'

To add insult to injury, the UN agreement put the Indonesian military in charge of security in the territory. Imagine you have two warring parties – one is a pro-independence group and the other is an army which is anti-independence. You want peace. Do you give responsibility for keeping the peace to one of the warring parties?

The Indonesian army are clearly incapable of a policing role in East Timor. Since they invaded and occupied East Timor in 1975, the territory has become a symbol of their strength and prestige. Posts in charge of security in East Timor have been highly prized in military ranks. Operations there have also been lucrative – the military owns thousands of properties, mostly coffee estates in western East Timor. And their most successful riser through the ranks, General Suharto, owns about 40 per cent of East Timor's land, according to George Aditjondro.

The UN's action gave the military more room to manoeuvre in East Timor but also in Aceh and West Papua, provinces which have separatist sentiments. In Jakarta, the *preman* (rascals and gangs in the employ of the military) have resurfaced on the streets. The office where I interviewed Dita and other activists in Jakarta was firebombed. Other campaigners experienced increasing threats and intimidation in the last few months. It has been terrifying to watch their gains against the military slip so quickly.

Army chief General Wiranto even felt confident enough to put legislation before Parliament in September that would introduce a national state of emergency. The Urban Poor Consortium (profiled on page 25) were the first to protest against this and got very close to Parliament to present their case. But when students came out in their thousands riot-control forces responded with beatings and plastic bullets in the

Make your own militia

How the military did it and who knew

◆ **July 1998:** Ausaid worker Lansell Taudevin tells Australian embassy officials that the Indonesian army is forming and arming militia gangs. Around 5,000 West Timorese (ethnically identical to East Timorese, though Muslim rather than Roman Catholic) are recruited into militias by the Indonesian army. More recruits are brought in from Java.

◆ **4 November 1998:** 400 élite troops from Indonesia's notorious Kopassus Group 4 unit – trained to track down and eliminate political dissidents – arrive in the port of Atapupu.

◆ **January 1999:** Civil servants in East Timor are threatened in order to make them pledge their support for integration with Indonesia. Even the Governor of East Timor Abilio Osorio Soares suggests that those who support independence should leave their jobs and says their safety is not guaranteed.

◆ **February 1999:** Major-General Zacky Anwar Makarim, a US-trained intelligence specialist, stands down as head of the military's intelligence agency to become the senior military adviser of the Indonesian Government's plebiscite team in East Timor. Makarim has a reputation for callous violence in East Timor. The pro-integration militia leaders are promised logistical support, weapons and at least two million dollars.

◆ **4 March 1999:** Representatives of the Australian Defence Intelligence Organization in Jakarta tell their headquarters that the military is 'clearly protecting and in some cases operating with the militias.' They also warn that the militias will undertake a scorched-earth campaign if the vote goes against them.

◆ **March 1999:** East Timorese representative José Ramos Horta warns: 'If the UN simply relies on the will of the Indonesian side and pushes ahead with the vote, bloodshed is almost certain because the Indonesian army will be there, the paramilitary will be there, and their interest is to disrupt the vote, to intimidate the people.'

◆ **5 May 1999:** The agreement on the 'consultation' or referendum in East Timor is signed. The Indonesian military is to provide a 'secure and safe' environment for the vote.

◆ **9 June 1999:** The Australian Government admits through senior defence official Hugh White that the military is supporting militia gangs.

◆ **24 July 1999:** A secret six-hour meeting of militia and military leaders in Dili is held. They lay out a post-referendum plan that includes instigation of riots, targeting and assassination of independence activists and full mobilization of militias and armed forces. Makarim gives militia leader Eurico Guterres a list of 370 people to eliminate as part of a campaign of terror. All UN staff and foreign journalists are to be forced out of East Timor.

◆ **30 August 1999:** The overwhelming majority – 80 per cent – of East Timorese vote for independence. Once the result is announced violence escalates.

◆ **23 September 1999:** *Financial Times* journalist Sander Thoenes is found dead in East Timor. He is last seen being chased by soldiers. Recently he exposed a $250-million scandal at a company controlled by General Prabowo. ■

Moment of triumph – the vote for independence.

PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER

worst violent clash in Jakarta since November 1998. It was also the first time that the protesters used violence against the military – stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown from the crowd.

Aggression by the protesters is a significant and negative development. It indicates an atmosphere where militarization is once again sanctioned.

The UN contributed to this downward spiral by failing to stop the violence in East Timor. It seemed reasonable for the East Timorese to expect that the thousands of white observers who had crowded out the hotels and jammed the flights to Dili would ensure their peaceful transition to independence. But, once they had raised the hope of the locals for peace, the UN seemed to be like children who block their ears so as not to hear bad news. The violence continued unabated. There were also reliable indications that the announcement of a pro-independence vote would unleash militia rage (see box). But still the UN insisted on holding the referendum thinking it could face the consequences with its meagre contingent of unarmed personnel.

In a cringe-worthy interview on 3 September Secretary-General Kofi Annan says: 'Even on 30 August people were saying that we could not have elections because there would be violence. It took place very well. I'm in contact with the Indonesian Government, and they have said that they will do what they can. Until now they have done their best.'

It was announced: 'The United Nations is here for the long term. We will not leave East Timor after the referendum.' The UN left on 14 September, just two weeks after the vote. The predicted scorched-earth campaign which displaced half the population and killed thousands was unleashed without witnesses. The brazen intimidation of East Timorese by the militias spread as far as Jakarta.

Throughout the militia campaign, the one thing that the Indonesian military could be forgiven for is confusion about what the West wanted. Although they talk about human rights, the US, Britain and Australia – the three most substantial sources of arms and military training to Indonesia – have continued this assistance over the past year. Leading American investigative journalist Allen Nairn reported that in April US Admiral Dennis Blair told General Wiranto that the US would initiate new riot-control training for the armed forces – the first such programme since 1992. Contrary to what the State Department officials had been told in writing, Blair told Wiranto that soldiers as well as police could be included. Nairn says that Indonesian officers he spoke to were delighted and saw this a green light to proceed with militia operations.

Now that the UN and the West have got both Indonesia and East Timor into this mess, what can be done? The mobilization of a multinational peacekeeping force is a positive move. The next stage will be to try and establish some sense of law and order. So far reports indicate that militia members arrested by the peacekeepers are being turned over to the Indonesian police. Given that the justice system in the country is largely hostage to the army, this will not prove an effective way of bringing the militias and their leaders to trial. An alternative national justice system – fairer, cleaner and democratically accountable – is imperative.

There is also a need for the new Indonesian Parliament to recognize the results of the referendum and make firmer commitments as to how the transition to independence will occur. There is still much that could thwart East Timor's move to independence if the pro-democracy parties and the justice system do not support it.

Another urgent action the West needs to take is to stop supplying the Indonesian army with weapons and assistance. It seems like a simple enough gesture towards support for peace in East Timor and Indonesia yet still some nations, especially Britain – the largest exporter of arms to Indonesia before the economic crisis – seem to be incapable of this. Last year British Defence Secretary George Robertson urged the sale of armoured vehicles to notorious commander General Prabowo, whom he described as 'an enlightened officer, keen on human rights.' In September this year when the military's involvement in the militia campaign was completely transparent, Britain sent Indonesia three Hawk aircraft.

The West cannot go on saying it supports human rights in Indonesia while arming and supporting the military, dealing with an illegitimate government and saying nothing when pro-democracy groups are still being jailed, shot and intimidated in Jakarta and elsewhere.

Just as Indonesia and East Timor are at a critical juncture between embracing freedom or having their arms tied by a system that will not change, so the West has a crucial decision to make. It must either support the current defunct Government and a repressive military – or it must reject both of these and welcome not just the new nation of East Timor but also the long-awaited awakening of the world's third-biggest democracy. ■

ACTION on INDONESIA

Say NO to Suharto's rich kids

AOTEAROA/ NEW ZEALAND

SUHARTO'S FAMILY MEMBERS, plus other Indonesians who got rich during his reign, quietly bought up real estate in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This was first exposed by the Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa who aroused a public outcry against Lilybank Lodge – a luxury hotel and hunting retreat built on the banks of Lake Tekapo which was owned by Suharto's son Tommy. Now the Campaign has discovered that Goldfield Heights, overlooking Queenstown's icy Lake Wakatipu, has attracted a clutch of Indonesia's élite to its shores, including Suharto's middle daughter, Siti Hediati Prabowo ('Titiek') and her husband, the sacked armed forces commander General Prabowo Subianto.

The Campaign wants properties acquired by corrupt Indonesians to be seized. They also comment on the Suhartos: 'This family of thieves presiding over a system of mass murder and institutionalized looting are the ones who should be in the dock, for crimes against the people of Indonesia and for crimes against humanity.'

Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa
PO Box 2258
Christchurch.
Tel/Fax: +64 3366 3988.
E-mail: cafca@mail.chch.planet.org.nz

Amnesty New Zealand
PO Box 793
Wellington.
Tel: +64 4499 3349.
Fax: +64 4499 3505.
E-mail: campaign@amnesty.org.uk/
Website: www.amnesty.org.nz/

PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER: D SAULNIER / CAMERA PRESS: DAVID PALMER / IMPCAT

SUHARTO
GET LOST
Nikon

Stop British-made slaughter

BRITAIN

IN MAY 1997 the new Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said: 'We will not permit the sale of arms to regimes that might use them for internal repression or international aggression.' It seemed reasonable to believe Cook – as early as 1978 he described the sale of British Hawk aircraft to Indonesia as 'particularly disturbing'. But that same month, May 1997, the new government gave the go-ahead to the export of riot-control vehicles and water cannons which were used on unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators in Jakarta.

POLISI
POLISI

TV direct-action satirist Mark Thomas broadcast a conversation recorded with Paul Greenwood, director of CS-gas manufacturers Pains Wessex, who says: 'The UK Government don't care. I've had the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) down... and I've said can I take the order and get somebody else to make it and ship it (and they said) "Yeah that's fine". Just as long as we're not shipping it in the UK they don't give a toss.' The Blair Government had approved 64 new arms contracts to the Indonesian Government by February this year and fewer than 1 per cent of the applications were turned down between August 1997 and August 1998. The Government sent three British Hawk aircraft to Indonesia in September this year. Campaign Against the Arms Trade are keeping up the pressure.

Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT)
11 Goodwin Street
Finsbury Park
London N4 3HQ.
Tel: +44 171 281 0297.
Fax: +44 171 281 4369.
E-mail: enquiries@caat.demon.co.uk
Website: www.caat.demon.co.uk

Amnesty UK
99-119 Rosebery Avenue
London EC1R 4RE.
Tel: +44 171 814 6200.
Fax: +44 171 833 1510.
E-mail: information@amnesty.org.uk
Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/

Down to Earth
PO Box 218
London SE5 7LU.
Tel/Fax: +44 1508 471413.
E-mail: dtecampaign@gn.apc.org

Tapol
111 Northwood Road
Thornton Heath
Surrey CR7 8HW.
Tel: +44 181 771 2904.
Fax: +44 181 653 0322.
E-mail: tapol@gn.apc.org
Website: www.gn.apc.org/tapol/listabouttapol.htm

Demand change in the tourism industry

AUSTRALIA

THOUSANDS OF AUSTRALIANS travel to Bali each year. But most put their money into the pockets of Suharto's cronies who own many of the luxury hotels or international corporations rather than helping the locals. Although millions of tourism dollars are poured into Bali, in the words of one Balinese; 'The people here mainly think about how they are going to eat tomorrow.' There are a number of groups working to promote more ethical tourism. Contact: Responsible Tourism Network PO Box 34, Rundle Mall SA 5000. Tel: +61 8 8232 2727 or + 61 8 8232 2727. Fax: +61 08 8232 2808 or +61 8 8232 2808. E-mail: bwitty@ozemail.com.au Website: www.caa.org.au/travel/rtn

The travel retailer Flight Centre has become the first to react to the tragedy in East Timor. Flight Centre – which sends around 100,000 travellers to Indonesia each year – wrote to Indonesian embassies around the world this year warning that it will encourage its clients not to holiday in Bali. Chief executive officer, Graham Turner, said in September: 'We will also be advising people not to fly with Garuda, the [Indonesian] national carrier.' Flight Centre's business to Indonesia amounts to between $130 million and $150 million a year, or 10 per cent of their business out of Australia – a powerful pressure point. When booking a holiday ask your travel agent exactly where your money is going and use your purchasing power for change. ***If you are interested in finding out more, Murdoch University offers an Asian Sustainable Development online study course. There is a special stream on Society, Culture and Ecology in South-East Asia, co-ordinated by Indonesia specialist, Dr Carol Warren. One of the major case studies offered is based on Carol's fieldwork in Bali, looking at social change impacts of tourism. Tel: +61 8 9360 2345. E-mail: asianst@central.murdoch.edu.au Website: www.istp.murdoch.edu.au/***

Australian Council for Overseas Aid
Private Bag 3
Deakin ACT 2600.
Tel: +61 2 6285 1816.
Fax: + 61 2 6285 1720.
E-mail: acfoa@acfoa.asn.au
Website: www.acfoa.asn.au/
ACFOA Human Rights office
124 Napier St
Fitzroy, VIC 3065.
Tel: +61 3 9417 7505.
Fax: +61 3 9416 2746.
E-mail: acfoahr@acfoa.asn.au

Action in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor (ASIET)
PO Box 458
Broadway NSW 2007
Tel: +61 2 9690 1032.
Fax: +61 2 9690 1381.
E-mail: asiet@asiet.org.au
Website: www.asiet.org.au/

Amnesty Australia
Private Bag 23
Broadway NSW 2007.
Tel: +61 2 9211 3566.
Fax: +61 2 9211 3608.
E-mail: adminai@amnesty.org.au
Website: www.amnesty.org.au

Refuse to support repression

CANADA

While the Canadian Government claims to support human rights, it has a deeply complicit set of economic relationships with the Indonesian Government and military. This was dramatically demonstrated when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police violently suppressed human-rights demonstrations at the 1997 APEC summit meeting held in Vancouver, in order to spare President Suharto embarrassment. The National East Timor Action Network demands the Canadian Government stop all ties to the Indonesian military including both new and old export permits for military hardware and any training or future military sales; and suspend all official economic aid to the Indonesian Government, instead transferring humanitarian aid through accountable non-governmental organizations.

National East Timor Action Network, PO Box 4115,
Station E Ottawa, ON K1S 5B1. Tel: +1 613 230 4070. Fax +1 613 230 8854.
E-mail: info@etan.ca Website: www.etan.ca

Amnesty Canada
4F, 214 Montreal Rd
Vanier, ON KIL 1A4.
Tel: +1 613 744 7667 or 1 800 AMNESTY
Fax: +1 613 746-2411.
E-mail: info@amnesty.ca
Website: www.amnesty.ca/

Canadian Action for Indonesia and East Timor
PO Box 562, Stn P
Toronto, ON M5S 2T1.
Tel: +1 416 531 5850.
Fax: +1 416 588 5556.
E-mail: cafiet@interlog.com
Website: www.interlog.com/~cafiet

Canada-Asia Working Group
947 Queen St W, Suite 213
Toronto, ON M4M 1J9.
Tel: +1 416 465 8826.
Fax: +1 416 463 5569.
E-mail: krcawg@web.net

Canadians Concerned About Ethnic Violence in Indonesia
119 Spadina Ave, Suite 605
Toronto, ON M5V 2L1.
Tel: +1 416 977 9871.
Fax: +1 416 977 1630.
E-mail: national@ccnc.ca

End war in Aceh

UNITED STATES

Whether we like it or not, the US has the political power to bring warring parties to the negotiating table. Human Rights Watch has been consistently putting pressure on Indonesia and the nations that support it to halt human-rights abuses. They say the US can act on Aceh: 'First, it can continue to press both President Habibie and General Wiranto for prosecutions of officers responsible for grave abuses during DOM (the period of military control). Habibie formally apologized to the people of Aceh for the abuses earlier this year, but such apologies carry no weight unless some form of redress, including prosecution in court, takes place. Second, it can urge the Indonesian Government to reduce troop strength in Aceh. Such a reduction would be a huge confidence-building measure by the Indonesian Government toward the Acehnese. True, the conflict is escalating, but in the past, more troops have just meant more massacres, and that pattern appears to be continuing. Moreover, fewer troops might force the Government to explore non-military solutions. The Acehnese we interviewed also want a third party to mediate the conflict. The Government thus far has rejected this out of hand; it does not want to give legitimacy to Aceh Merdeka.' Human Rights Watch, 34th Floor, 350 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10118-3299.
Tel: +1 212 290 4700. Fax: +1 212 736-1300. E-mail: hrwnyc@hrw.org
Website: www.hrw.org/campaigns/indonesia/index.htm

Yellow Ribbon Campaign (Human rights equality for Indonesian Chinese)
Suite 700, 456 Montgomery Street
San Francisco CA 94104-1240.
Website: www.huaren.org

Amnesty USA
Campaigns Department
600 Pennsylvania Ave SE
Washington DC 20003.
Tel: +1 202 544 0200.
Fax: +1 202 546 7142.
E-mail:
robinbrown@amnesty-usa.org
Website: www.amnesty-usa.org/

Worth reading on... INDONESIA

The Mute's Soliloquy – A Memoir by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Hyperion, 1999; ISBN: 0-7868-6416-8). A great writer and political prisoner shares his memories. *Inside Out East Timor* with photography by Ross Bird and text by Xanana Gusmao, José Ramos Horta and Bishop Carlos Belo (Herman Press, 1999; ISBN: 0-9577180-3-9). Stunning photos and captions illustrate the beauty of East Timor and its people. *Reformasi – Crisis and Change in Indonesia* edited by Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury, (Monash Asia Institute, 1999; ISBN: 0-7326-1179-2). A great selection of Indonesian and other writers explaining Indonesia's political change. *The Rough Guide to Indonesia* by Stephen Backshall, David Leffman, Lesley Reader, Henry Stedman (Rough Guides, 1999; ISBN:1-8582-8429-5). The best and most recent travel and country guide. *Inside Indonesia* magazine. A monthly magazine on Indonesian issues. To subscribe, visit their website www.insideindonesia.org/ or contact: PO Box 1326, Collingwood, Vic 3066, Australia. Tel: +61 3 9419 4504. Fax: +61 3 9419 4774. E-mail: admin@insideindonesia.org

PAULA BRONSTEIN / FRANK SPOONER; PATRICK AVENTURIER / FRANK SPOONER

Websites

Amnesty International campaigns for all Indonesians whose human rights have been violated. See contact details for your country and check out the Indonesia page of their general website: www.amnesty.org/ailib/countries/indx321.htm

The World Wide Web Virtual Library on Indonesia has links to just about every organization on Indonesia under the sun: http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVLPages/IndonPages/WWWVL-Indonesia.html

The INCORE Guide to Internet Sources on Conflict and Ethnicity in Indonesia is good for background information on the country: www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds/countries/indonesia.html#topsource

Indonesia Online – the National Library of Australia site has comprehensive information and links, especially useful for Australian surfers. www.nla.gov.au/asian/indo/indoline.html

The **NI** Interview

STEPHANIE BOYD

Margarita Males Guallosamín

Stephanie Boyd visits a grassroots leader of Ecuador's community women's movement.

It is difficult to believe that Margarita Males Guallosamín was once a battered wife, unable to leave the house without her husband's permission, trapped by her economic dependence on him. A video on domestic violence in Ecuador shows Margarita some years ago telling her story at a women's counselling session, face awash with tears, eyes puffy and voice uncertain. But the woman before me is nearly unrecognizable from the person on video – confident, energetic and full of humorous stories. The change, she says, came about when she started attending meetings of a local women's group, the Quito sector of the National Women's Movement of Popular Neighborhoods (in Spanish this phrase is used to describe poor urban communities).

Now Margarita is National Co-ordinator of the organization and a leading feminist in Ecuador's grassroots women's movement. With chapters in 8 of the country's 20 provinces, the movement brings together women from a variety of backgrounds – Afro-Ecuadorians, indigenous women, sex workers and other low-income urban women. Together they push for women's political participation on a community and national level, as well as women's and children's rights.

At first, Margarita says, she had to ask her husband's permission to attend the meetings, but 'little by little', with the support of the other women and a new-found self-esteem, she managed to change his attitude – and also his behavior. Now she says her home life is no longer abusive. And, breaking into a wide grin, she adds: 'I no longer ask to attend meetings; I just go.'

Margarita explains that one of the movement's biggest achievements is the sense of friendship and solidarity created amongst the women. In tough times they help each other out, emotionally and often economically, and share valuable information about legal and political rights. 'Many of our laws protecting women's rights are good; the problem is educating women about those rights,' she explains. 'We educate our daughters that women aren't just for the house and men for the street.'

'Many of our laws protecting women's rights are good, the problem is educating women about those rights'

Ecuador's mainstream women's movement has for the most part been unable or unwilling to reach out to women from marginalized communities. But Margarita has found an ally in Clara Merino, who works with the Corporation to Promote Women (CPM). Over the years, CPM has provided invaluable economic support and access to the often inhospitable world of international donor organizations.

Clara believes local communities are the most important group to work with in terms of women's rights because they have been the most ignored. The statistics alone support her claim: 50 per cent of all Ecuador's urban households are below the poverty line with 19 per cent in extreme poverty. Unemployment amongst Quito's poor is rampant and the majority of women living in 'popular neighborhoods' scratch out an existence through the informal sector, tending market stalls or as street-sellers of anything from gum to CDs.

And the country's economy is getting worse. President Jamil Mahuad's economic policies have given rise to a massive devaluation of the sucre, the local currency, precipitating a major banking crisis and hyperinflation. Prices for basic commodities like foodstuffs and gasoline rise overnight and unemployment has shot up from 9.0 to 11.5 per cent. Mahuad then delivered another blow by increasing sales taxes from 10 to 15 per cent and eliminating all subsidies on electricity and telecommunications. Adding to this burden, Ecuadorians are now forced to pay their own medical and hospital bills due to the privatization of previously state-run healthcare. With government support shrinking and prices rising, the movement's work is vital.

To help provide support for working mothers, the movement runs two daycare centers in Quito's lower-income neighborhoods. Together they house about 150 children. Margarita points out the need is always greater than the space available. She leads me to the kitchen of the center in her neighborhood to show that the children receive a balanced meal each day – fruit, soup, beans, rice and salad, and babies are weighed regularly to monitor their weight. Instructors are trained in alternative education and use a variety of songs, games and art-work to teach the basic skills as well as socialization and team work.

A group of five-year-olds proudly display their numbers projects, the number '10' outlined with large needles and wool. Nearby a serious-looking girl in a paint-spattered smock seems to be making a picture of her family, but when I ask her what she's painting she frowns at me and replies: 'I'm working, NOT painting.'

Outside, children play on swings or in a small wooden house, and roll tires around the fenced-in playground. Margarita points out that about half of the children are from indigenous migrant families who come to Quito from the surrounding mountains looking for work. Putting these children to play and learn with Afro-Ecuadorian and other mixed-race kids from an early age teaches them to respect diversity, she says. In the future, the women hope to expand the day-care centers with funds from a bakery project. Margarita is more than happy to show me the bakery, and help me taste the wares – sweet bread, egg rolls, whole wheat and dinner rolls. She insists that I sample each kind. The warm little shop and café is also staffed by women from the movement who train each new member in the technique of baking bread.

As we eat the hot, fresh bread Margarita admits that at first it was difficult for the movement to make inroads in the strongly *machista* culture. But now women's representatives attend local community meetings and have a say in making policy alongside the men. 'And now the same women who were against us in the beginning bring their children to the daycare,' she laughs, eyes twinkling. ■

Stephanie Boyd is an editor at *Latinamerica Press* in Lima, Peru.

Reviews

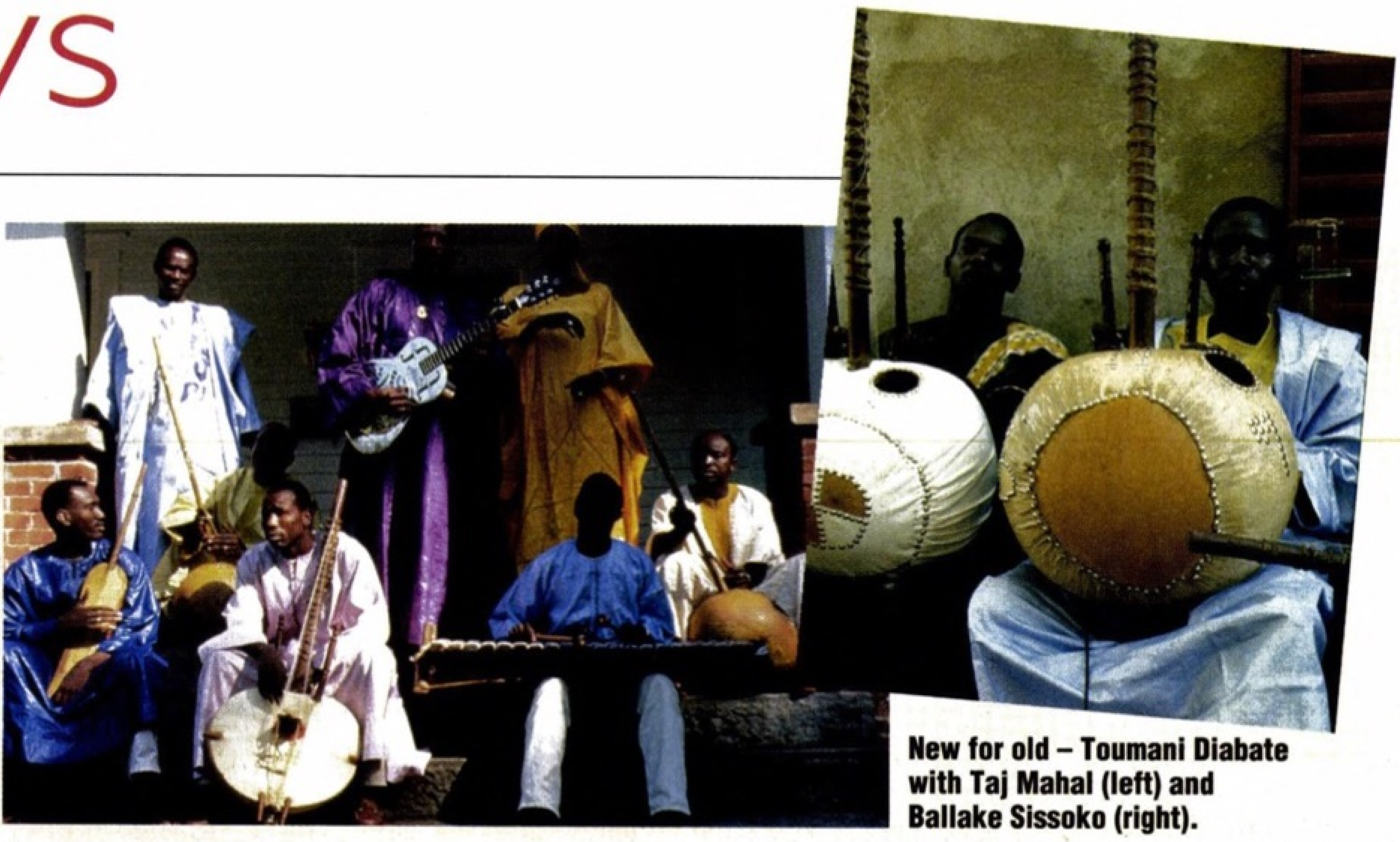
music

New Ancient Strings

by **Toumani Diabate**
with **Ballake Sissoko**
(Hannibal HNCD 1428 CD)

Papa

by **Salif Keita**
(Capitol/Metro Blue 7243 4 99070 2 7 CD)



New for old – Toumani Diabate with Taj Mahal (left) and Ballake Sissoko (right).

In recent years, Mali has done more than its bit in exporting world-class music abroad: names like Salif Keita, Toumani Diabate, Batourou Sekou Kouyaté and Ali Farka Touré immediately spring to mind. And the variety developed out of Mali's indigenous rhythms is second to none – Keita himself has worked out musical exchanges with jazz greats like Joe Zawinul and Carlos Santana; kora maestro Diabate has collaborated with flamenco groups and Taj Mahal.

Perhaps it's due to the extraordinary pliancy of Mali's kora sound. This instrument – half harp, half lute, with a big gourd as resonator – is in capable hands able to deliver up both melody and rhythm simultaneously. But while it's always been exciting to see how the kora can jam with guitars and so forth, there's nothing like the real thing itself. **New Ancient Strings** is, no doubt about it, the thing itself and Diabate and his kora-playing cousin, Djelimoussa Ballake Sissoko, have produced a wonderful work of traditional themes. Their duets have a timeless quality as the kora tunes flow in a lyrical stream. Inspired by the classic 1970 album, *Ancient Strings* (recorded, incidentally, by their fathers), **New Ancient Strings** invokes a sense of continuity. In reworking old traditions the pair weave a cloth for the future in which the lightness of their music, and that of their ancestors, dances. A captivating album.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

Diabate's magic kora work also flows through **Papa**, the latest album from his compatriot Salif Keita. With its big production, big numbers and to Western eyes, biggish guests such as Grace Jones and Vernon Reid, Keita's first album for Capitol is aimed at wider audiences than Diabate's contemplative material. It's perhaps understandable when one considers that Keita is some 15 years older than Diabate and it's been Keita's haunting voice and melodies that have put Mali on the map for non-African audiences. Accordingly, he deserves some latitude in the way he frames his sound.

Papa is, for all its punchy songs such as 'Ananamin' and 'Tomorrow', a mature album. Recorded between his native Bamako and New York, it is framed as a string of advice for his daughter: 'Stay away from the ill-intentioned, honour God and your people, and all will be well' is the gist of it. However, in Keita's hands the words and music fairly bubble up in a mellifluous mix. There are elements of irrepressible fun mixed with sadness; party songs alongside laments of lost loves, the most moving being about his father.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

LG

books

Refugees in an Age of Genocide

by **Tony Kushner** and **Katharine Knox**
(Frank Cass, ISBN 0 7146 4783 7)

Dubious Mandate: A Memoir of the UN in Bosnia, Summer 1995

by **Phillip Corwin**
(Duke University Press, ISBN 0 8223 2126 2)

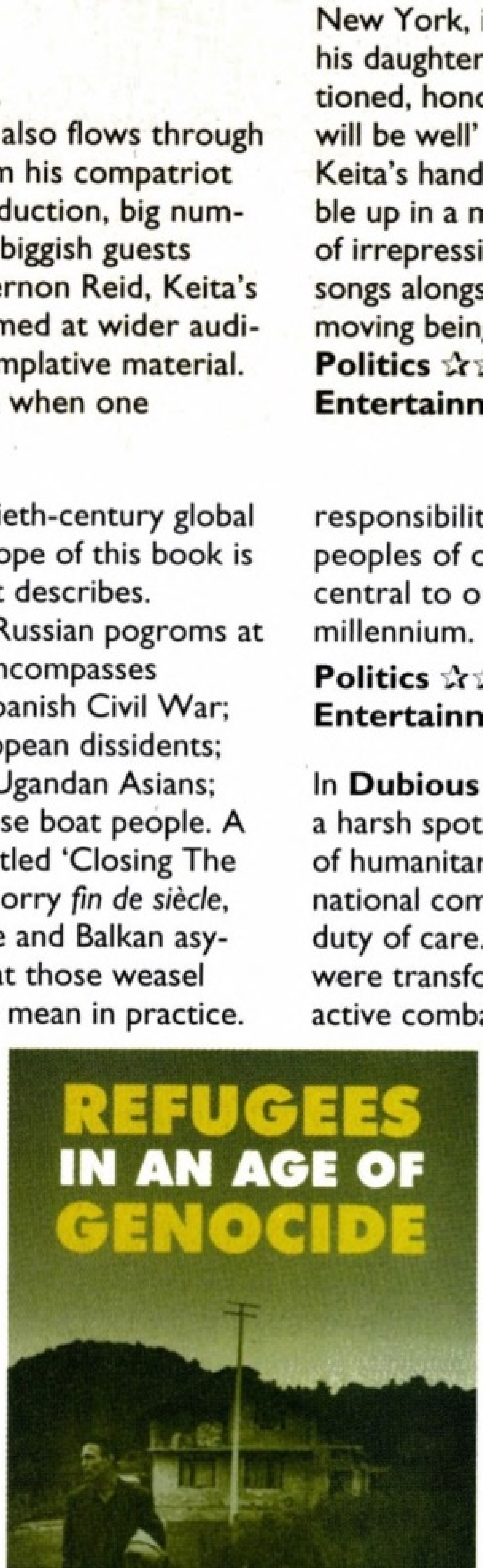
Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle For Global Justice

by **Geoffrey Robertson**
(Allen Lane, ISBN 0 713 99197 6)

'Future historians will call the twentieth the century of the refugee. Almost nobody at the end of the century is where they were at the beginning of it. It has been an extraordinary period of movement and upheavals.' With these words of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox open their monumental study of twentieth-century global refugee movements. The scope of this book is as staggering as the events it describes. Beginning with Jews fleeing Russian pogroms at the turn of the century, it encompasses Basque refugees from the Spanish Civil War; victims of Nazism; East European dissidents; Idi Amin's expulsion of the Ugandan Asians; Chilean exiles and Vietnamese boat people. A final section accurately subtitled 'Closing The Doors' considers our own sorry *fin de siècle*, in which Kurdish, Congolese and Balkan asylum-seekers experience what those weasel words 'firm but fair' actually mean in practice.

In an afterword on Kosovo, written in April as NATO bombing began, the authors make an eloquent plea for the Western world to reverse moves towards exclusion – 'the hardening of the caring arteries' – and to 'restore, revive and act upon the concept of asylum'.

Although **Refugees in an Age of Genocide** is intended for an academic audience, it deserves a much wider readership. It is written with style and passion and its subject – the responsibility we all owe to the displaced peoples of our planet – could not be more central to our hopes and fears for the new millennium.

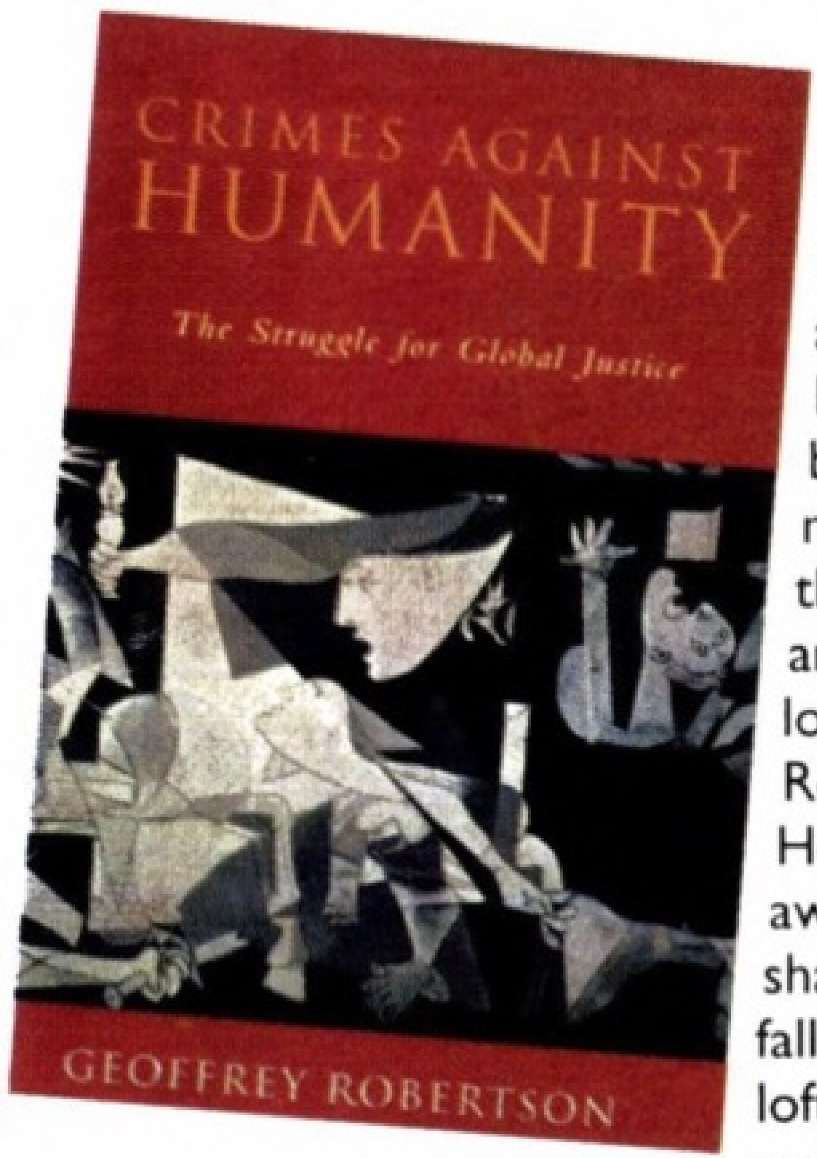


Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

In **Dubious Mandate**, Phillip Corwin throws a harsh spotlight on to one particular theatre of humanitarian operations in which the 'international community' conspicuously failed in its duty of care. In Bosnia in 1995, UN forces were transformed from peacekeepers into active combatants under NATO command. Corwin was the UN's chief political officer in Sarajevo in that year and his gripping account of the events is a challenge to the accepted orthodoxy of a plucky Bosnian Government, beset on all sides by rapacious enemies. In his dealings with the regime of Alija Izetbegovic, Corwin found himself confronted with a power-hungry and corrupt clique, equally able to spin the media and neutralize internal opposition. It is difficult to argue with Corwin's assessment that the leaders of all three sides in the conflict were no more than 'gangsters wearing coats and ties'. Although his account has more than a hint of the disillusioned bureaucrat, it is, nevertheless, an honest attempt to extract the truth from a quagmire of bad faith and bad decision-making.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

Living in such 'interesting' times, it would be beneficial to have a sober consideration of the place of human rights in international affairs. This is just what the British barrister Geoffrey Robertson attempts to provide in his ambitious book **Crimes Against Humanity**. He traces the advance of individual human rights and outlines the gradual encroachment on the powers of nation-states by such bodies as the International Court of Justice, War Crimes Tribunals and the International Criminal Court. That the establishment of these instruments of international justice has proceeded in lockstep with systematic abuse of human rights by governments across the globe is an irony not lost on Robertson. He is keenly aware of the shadow that falls between lofty statements of intent and the grubby business of prosecuting violators of human rights. His chapter on Pinochet's arrest is particularly good in this respect.



However, **Crimes Against Humanity** is not an unmitigated success; the author tries to cover too much territory and is often reduced to a hasty scamper across the facts when a more measured and thoughtful approach is required.

I also found the tone of the book overly legalistic, with little effort made to enliven the dull grinding of judicial machinery or relate the acres of official prose to the lives of breathing, thinking, suffering human beings, to whom 'justice' is not an arid abstraction but a daily struggle.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆ PW

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Norma Rae

...being a Hollywood anomaly of the first order.

SEVENTIES nostalgia seems to be everywhere. Disco music, polyester shirts and bell-bottom jeans have all made a comeback. And the movies of the 1970s are now being called 'Hollywood's Second Golden Age'. There is, indeed, a freshness and a genuine anarchic energy to US movies of that time. But there is a self-indulgent and distinctly male (even misogynist) quality to most of them, too.

I remember watching *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), knowing I was supposed to relate strongly to the plight of the pianist-turned-oil-field-roughneck hero (Jack Nicholson). But I didn't. To me, he was a working-class poseur who liked to mistreat women. And the movie lost me completely during the classic 'chicken salad sandwich' scene in which he violently explodes at a waitress when she won't allow him to substitute off the menu. As a second-wave feminist coming from a long line of cafeteria workers, I knew what a ludicrous symbol of repressive authority a truck-stop waitress was. And I found myself identifying with the exhausted, rule-bound waitress more than the film's rebellious and abusive hero.

Most of the films of the 'golden' Seventies don't speak to me, despite their nonconformist trappings. One very notable exception is a 1979 movie called **Norma Rae**. Based on the true story of a woman named Crystal Lee Sutton who helped to organize the JP Stevens textile mill in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, Norma Rae is a progressive Hollywood anomaly of the first order. Proudly working-class, as well as unmistakably pro-union, it is also a deeply feminist film that chronicles one woman's process of empowerment and links that process to mentoring instead of to sexual romance.

Sally Field's performance as the film's title character was a revelation. Norma Rae, a single mother of two, works in the same textile mill as the rest of her family and neighbors. The atmosphere in the windowless mill is hot, grey with cotton dust, and filled with a (literally) deafening clatter of antiquated machinery. But in the company town of 'Henleyville' workers feel powerless to improve their conditions.

Sex and alcohol are Norma's only release, until a labor organizer with the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA), a New Yorker named Reuben (Ron Leibman), shows up in town. Reuben is the first man to see Norma Rae as something more than mill 'trash' or an easy lay. He recognizes Norma's intelligence and her courage, and when she finally joins the union drive Reuben admits that she is 'the fish I wanted'.

Driven by the full realization of long-denied injustices and emboldened by a new-found belief in her own competence, Norma works night and day in the struggle. This delights Reuben, but enrages her new husband, Sonny, who expects Norma to work her second shift at home – cooking, cleaning, minding their blended brood of children, and seeing to his sexual needs. In a bitingly funny response to Sonny's indignant self-pity, Norma angrily rushes around her tiny kitchen one midnight, illustrating how ready and willing she is to cook, wash, iron and 'make love' simultaneously. Seldom has the sexist myth of the modern superwoman been so adeptly deflated!

It's certainly not a perfect film. Compressing the time period of the struggle makes a union drive look surprisingly easy. Focusing almost exclusively on Norma Rae and Reuben makes the TWUA's eventual victory look like the accomplishment of two people instead of hundreds. This is especially troubling as black workers were key to the real campaign's success. Although the movie acknowledges the importance of black churches as organizing sites, and Ritt's camera shows many African-Americans at organizing meetings, not a single black character rises above bit-player status.

The other shame of **Norma Rae** is the initial treatment (lawsuits were later settled) of Crystal Lee Sutton and *New York Times* reporter Henry P Leifermann who documented her story. When neither would precipitously sign releases the filmmakers simply changed people's names and a few minor details of the story. Twentieth Century Fox added the standard verbiage to the final credits that the 'characters' and 'events' were 'fictitious'.

Read *Crystal Lee: Woman of Inheritance* (1975) and you'll see what a bald-faced lie that is. Many of the details of the screenplay are taken straight from the biography, including the pivotal scene in which Norma Rae refuses to go quietly when she is fired. Instead she climbs on to a table and scrawls the word 'UNION' on a piece of cardboard. Turning the sign so that everyone on the floor can see it, she stands her ground until, one by one, her co-workers' machines stop in solidarity. Sally Field milks that screen moment for all it's worth, expressing all of Norma Rae's terror and triumph. I've viewed that scene at least a dozen times and I still catch my breath at the power of it.

It's this power that makes **Norma Rae** an enduring classic. A poor woman learns to respect herself and her abilities. She discovers that she can make a difference in this world. And then she goes out and does just that. Back in 1979, that was the kind of story you didn't see every day. Sad to say, 20 years later it's even more rare. ■

Kathi Maio

Norma Rae (1979) was directed by Martin Ritt.

Reviews

Angel on my shoulder: Ry Cooder hovers over Ruben Gonzáles.

film

Buena Vista Social Club

directed by **Wim Wenders**

It's something of an understatement to describe either German director Wim Wenders as simply a film director or Ry Cooder as just a musician with a classy line in slide guitar. Jointly and separately, the two (who worked together on the 1980s film *Paris, Texas*) have become pillars of singular and independently minded projects that create a subtle poetics suitable for all landscapes – be it Cold War Berlin or the Californian desert.

Unsurprisingly, the Cuba that the pair encountered on making **Buena Vista Social Club** provides a ripe topic. Everything on the island is ramshackle; steamy heat seems to rise from every surface. The attention is often in the details: the dusty Havana Egrem studio, built in the 1940s by RCA and still going strong; little girls playing on wobbly gymnastic equipment, a household shrine, a rusty chain around the city's harbour. And yet, what resurrects the place, time and again, is an indomitable spirit.

Buena Vista Social Club grew out of the album of the same name (reviewed in **NI 307**). Ry Cooder, a long-time enthusiast for son and mambo, tracked down the forgotten stars of the 1950s and before: a sprightly 90-year-old Compay Segundo, Omara Portuondo, Ibrahim Ferrer and Ruben Gonzáles head the list. He brought them together to form **Buena Vista Social Club**, named after a long-closed entertainment spot. The album was an international smash hit and, in 1998, Cooder returned, accompanied by Wenders and a small crew, to record with the band now renamed the Super-Abuelos (Super Grandparents). Wenders' film is a delicate, slow affair, suitable for the lazy rhythms and the shimmering Cuban heat. He follows the personal histories of the artists, records their perambulations around the island and, eventually, rapturous welcomes at concerts in Amsterdam and New York's Carnegie Hall.

As with his previous film *Wings of Desire*, Wenders shows that he has an intuitive understanding of how to make music work well in film. Shot throughout in a lingering hyper-colour that recalls the hand-tinted photographs of another generation, **Buena Vista Social Club** is far more than the story of a record or, indeed, a nostalgia. Its quiet outrage at the deprivation of the island – especially its treatment at the hands of the US – balances strangely with a realization that Cuba's isolation is, in part, responsible for the survival of its music. An end shot of a boy swinging down the coast road, accompanied by a radio and a disco soundtrack, is an eloquent statement for the future.

But indomitable spirits aside, this is also a fragile film. How could it be otherwise? The musicians of **Buena Vista Social Club** were all but forgotten by the world outside Cuba: on the brink of death, their art is rediscovered. Wenders recognizes their natural dignity and consummate poise, but there is something unbearably moving about the process. Is **Buena Vista Social Club** a vindication of their work? Yes, but it is hard to feel that it is not also their obituary.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ LG

Reviewers: **Louise Gray, Peter Whittaker**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

The **NI** Crossword

38 by Axe

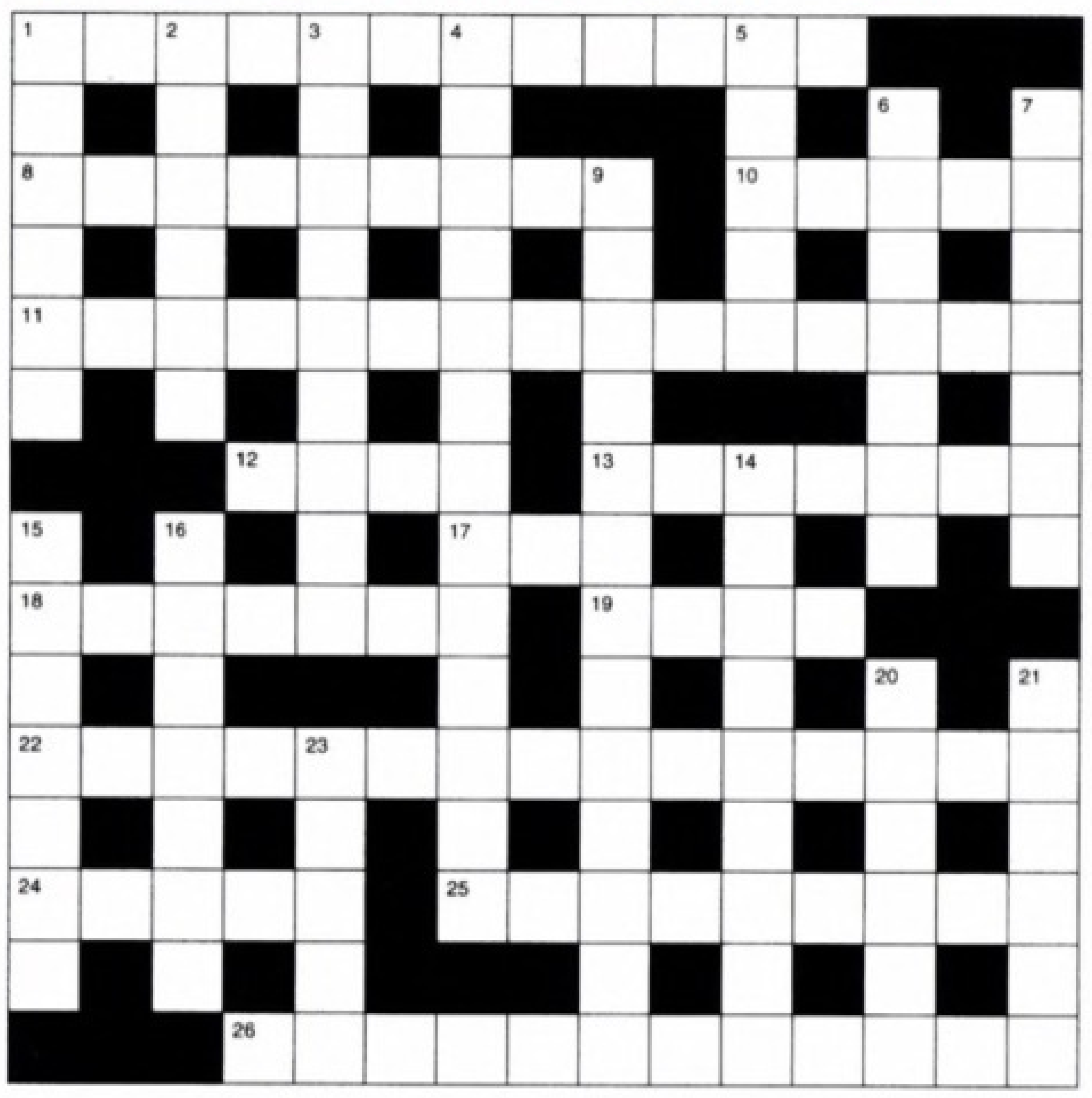
CRYPTIC

Across

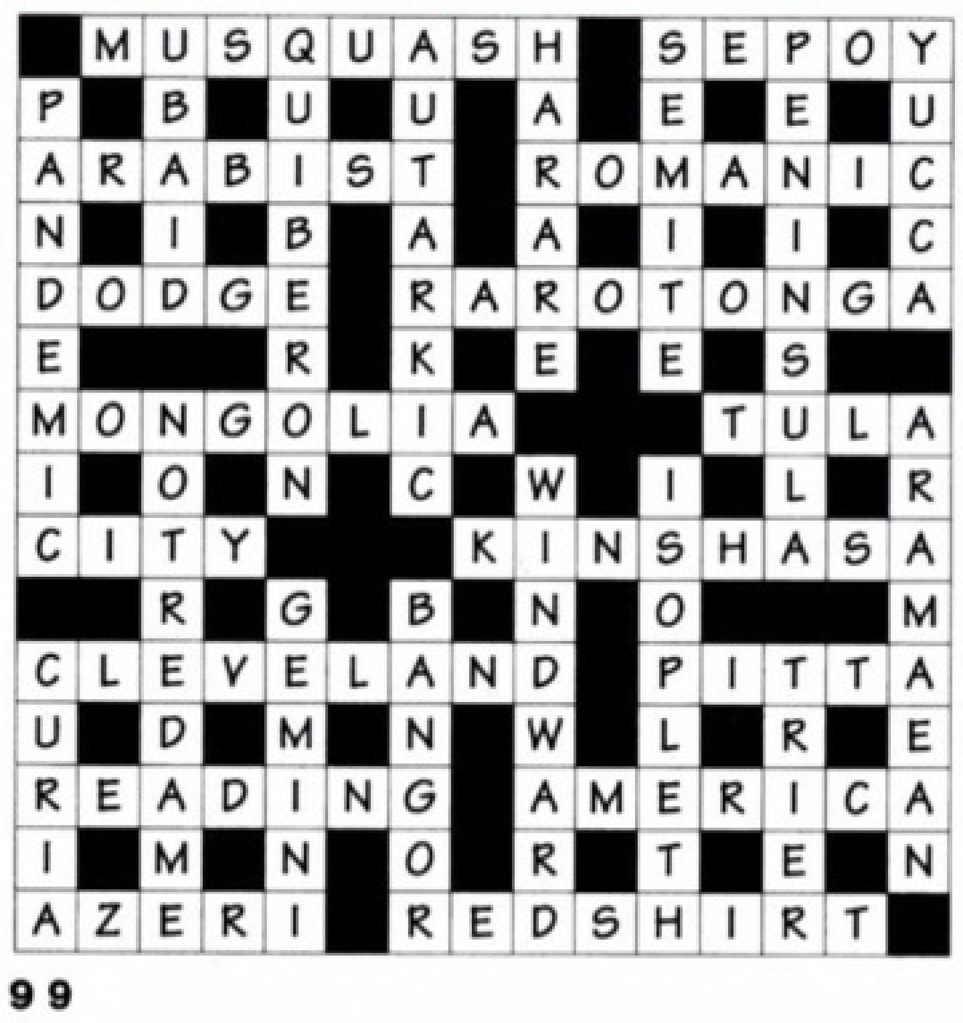
1 Instrument associated with Somalia, perhaps (4,2,6)
8 Porky-types who follow Roger's training? (9)
10 East's in debt when the dust has settled (5)
11 Epidemic from south of 1a caused by crack – madness grips the Beka'a, for one (4,6,5)
12 Steak on the bone, for example, one judges commonly not to be kosher (4)
13 Asian bird has pulse which goes in and out (7)
17 He fought relative of Muhammad (3)
18 Queen attending, reportedly, a service she assembles (7)
19 Head of Scottish Water? (4)
22 Debutantes appear in court – that of 7, perhaps (6,2,7)
24 It flows against one of 7's 22? (5)
25 Language expert, of the first degree, gets First (9)
26 Meetings of cardinals, criminals and Conservatives – one's overwhelmed (12)

Down

1 Design first kitchen appliance for Australian city (6)
2 Brazil's fierce struggle? (6)
3 General consumers order French wine the wrong way and get some rosé for a change (9)
4 Crop growing practised – plant in a circle (6,7)
5 He succeeds Muhammad on the West Coast shortly (5)
6 Monkeys get up and go the other way (7)
7 Artisan and king-maker? (7)
9 Industry base for fishing pays off (8,5)
14 Unhappily abstain to go to party – it's punishing on the feet (9)
15 Turkish delight's key: add a kilo and go with the flow (7)
16 They sacked a London museum and detailed the LSE (7)
20 States meet over Ulster – last resort in Italy (6)
21 A software man using his marbles (6)
23 Muse and hold forth, convulsed (5)



Last month's solution



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A	R	A	B	I	S	T	■	R	O	M	A	N	I	C
N	■	I	■	B	■	A	■	A	■	I	■	I	■	C
D	O	D	G	E	■	R	A	R	O	T	O	N	G	A
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A	Z	E	R	I	■	R	E	D	S	H	I	R	T	■

QUICK

Across

1 Peninsula separating the Gulf of Aden from the Indian Ocean (4,2,6)
8 Followers of Roger or Francis? (9)
10 Dust-blown sediment (5)
11 Disease affecting cattle and humans in East Africa (4,6,5)
12 Food forbidden for Jews (4)
13 Asian language, akin to Burmese and based on the Sanskrit alphabet (7)
17 Cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad (3)
18 Hoarder, compiler (7)
19 Scottish loch linked to sea by Caledonian Canal (4)
22 Attendants to the royals (6,2,7)
24 Longest river on the European continent (5)
25 One who takes a particular interest in this European country? (9)
26 Spiritual and ecclesiastical courts (12)

Down

1 Capital of Tasmania (6)
2 Port and capital of Pernambuco state, Brazil (6)
3 All-devouring animals (9)
4 Crop-growing agriculture (6,7)
5 Old Islamic spiritual leader (5)
6 African guenon monkeys (7)
7 Russian empress (7)
9 Plant where metals are separated (8,5)
14 Torture by beating feet with a baton (9)
15 Middle eastern sweet featuring filo pastry (7)
16 Members of a Germanic tribe who overran much of Rome's Western Empire in the fifth Century AD (7)
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My first wanderer

The Ancient Mariner sealed his fate by killing the albatross. **Horatio Morpurgo** thinks we are doing the same thing – on an industrial scale.

THIRTY MILES off the coast of New South Wales, scientists and environmentalists have hired a fishing boat for the day. They throw lumps of mincemeat off the stern as wandering albatrosses fly in and settle on the water to feed. They are scooped up in nets, have a rubber band wrapped around the powerful beak, then they are weighed, measured, ringed and let go. They generally remain docile as they undergo these indignities, more bemused than alarmed.

NORBERT WU / STILL PICTURES

The Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association (SOSSA) has been doing this since 1956. Every winter vast numbers of cuttlefish come to breed and die in the waters off Woollongong, and several species of albatross gather to feed on the carcasses, the wanderers travelling up to 9,000 miles.

Humans have long been fascinated by the world's largest flying bird, which breeds on remote islands and lives for up to 90 years – Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* likens it to 'a Christian soul', to Baudelaire it was a symbol of the roaming imagination and in this century satellites have been used to study its unrivalled flying and navigating abilities.

In the 21st century, however, it could come to symbolize something altogether less romantic. Every year the world's fishing fleet throws back into the sea some 20 million tonnes of fish and other marine wildlife, known as 'bycatch'. And every year some 40,000 albatrosses, mostly young birds, form a part of it. This is not a case of humans and albatrosses competing for a food, but of carelessness on an industrial scale.

Albatrosses follow longline fishing boats for the waste thrown overboard. They also scavenge the baits as they are paid out from the stern of the ship. Once hooked they are drawn underwater by the sinking longline and are drowned. The death-rate works out at around 0.4 albatrosses per 1,000 hooks. Between 70 and 100 million hooks are set each year in the Southern Oceans. The southern bluefin tuna was fished out in the 1980s by the Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean fleets, using up to 180 million hooks per year between them. Severely reduced catches led to the introduction of quotas, so in the early 1990s these fleets shifted to sub-Antarctic waters. Their operations overlap now with almost all the main feeding-grounds used by wandering albatrosses.

There are simple and proven methods of reducing seabird bykill. The use of streamers fluttering over the line as it is set is known to reduce the carnage by up to 75 per cent. Using properly weighted lines, fully thawed bait and casting machines, the line can be made to sink quicker than the birds can dive for it. Lines can be set at night. Offal can be dumped at the other end of the boat, directing birds away from the lines. Researchers in Australia are developing a hook which will not catch fish, or anything else, until it is 20 metres below the surface. All or any of these would significantly improve the situation.

I had never actually seen one of these birds before. We left harbour an hour before dawn – Woollongong is an industrial town as well as a port, with an orange pall in the sky above its steel works even at that hour. The coastline is still just visible at daybreak when the first wanderer swings into view. It circles the boat on massive speckled wings – a young bird – the tips making minute adjustments to avoid touching the surface of the water. Then it banks and glides in again to give us a closer look. The end of the coastal shelf is still some distance away, so we are not yet throwing out bait. One more time around and it turns towards the open sea, low over the water.

It is hard to give up on a creature like that. With a slow rate of reproduction – one chick every other year – they are very vulnerable to sudden population loss such as that inflicted over the past 20 years. The survival-rate in young birds needs to be at least 32 per cent to sustain a stable population and is now down to 30 per cent. Serious declines have been recorded at all the main breeding grounds.

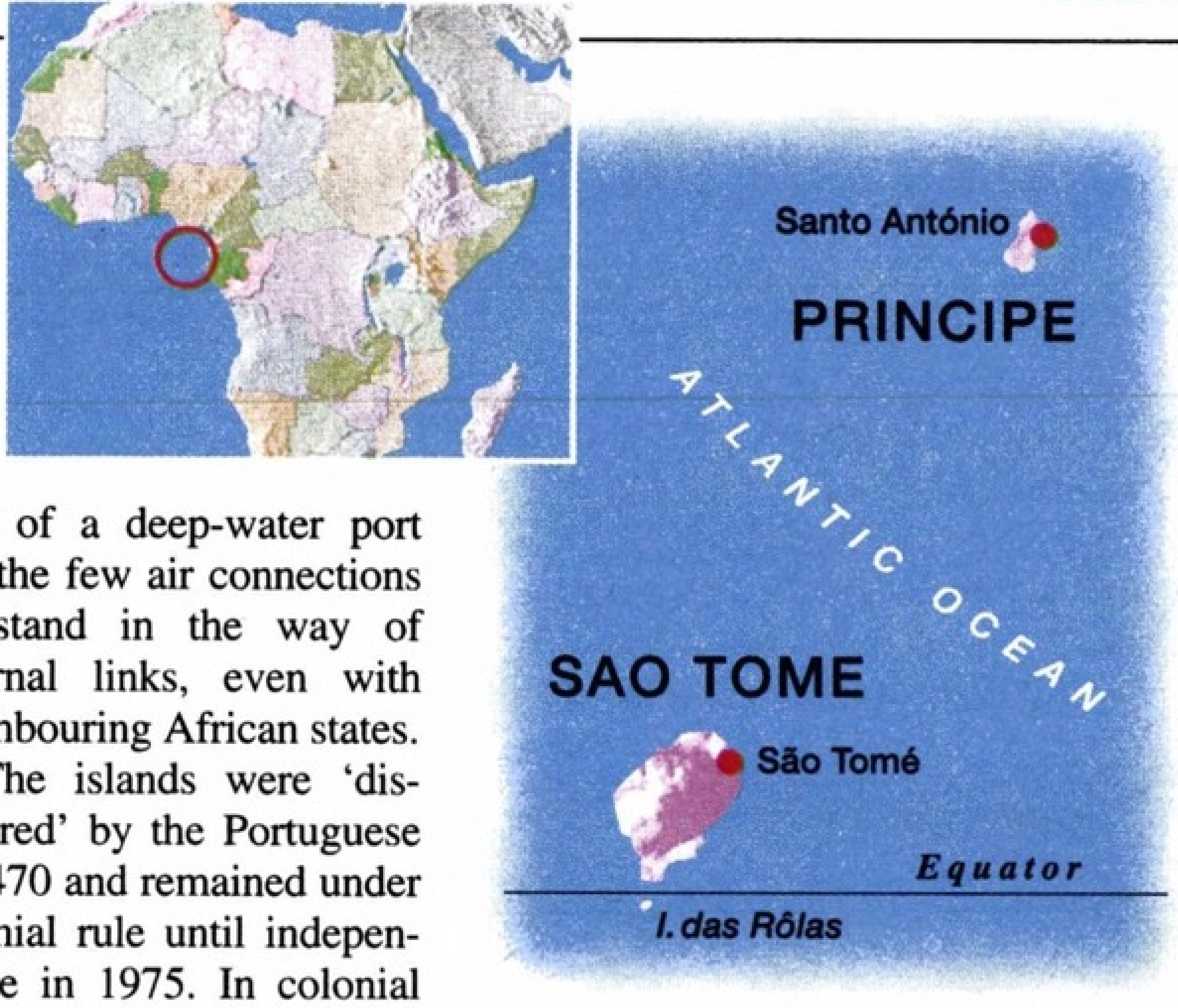
The outcry over dolphin mortality on the Pacific yellowfin tuna fisheries led to improved fishing practices and a significant decline in dolphin bykill. It can be done. The use of drift-nets on the high seas, so lethal to all marine wildlife, may continue illegally but was largely phased out by the end of 1992 because of pressure from environmentalists. WWF Australia is now running a campaign to promote the many methods of reducing albatross bykill. They are under no illusions about the scale of the task. There is little or no monitoring of the Asian tuna fleets in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which are by far the biggest.

Which raises larger questions. The world's fishing fleets have doubled in size since 1970. A recent WWF report estimates that 13 of the world's largest fleets, including that of the European Union, have a capacity two-and-a-half times greater than required for a sustainable catch. As the oceans, north and south, are plundered at an ever-crazier rate, it is as well to know what we are buying into when we reach for that oh-so-reasonably-priced tin of tuna fish on the supermarket shelf. Our grandchildren may not thank us for being so penny-wise. ■

Horatio Morpurgo is a freelance writer based in London.

Country profile

São Tomé and Príncipe



A LOST paradise marks the spot at the 'centre' of the world, the point at which Greenwich Mean Time meets the Equator. São Tomé and Príncipe is made up of beautiful islands that combine unspoilt rainforest and golden beaches with fading architectural splendour.

São Tomé and Príncipe is one of Africa's smallest nations. It lies 300 kilometres east of Gabon and its two main islands are 150 kilometres apart. The local culture has yet to be conquered by Coca-Cola, cigarettes or mass tourism and the islands stand out proudly in the ocean with a confidence born of separation from such global 'ills'.

Indeed, isolation shapes much of life here. The capital, São Tomé City, is becoming the main population centre. This has made areas in the south of the island without telephones or electricity feel comparatively isolated, with few connections and very poor roads. Travellers heading for the southernmost tip of the island will be asked by locals to take letters to distant loved ones.

Príncipe is even more remote: only 4.3 per cent of the total population live on the island, and problems with the boat service mean an expensive plane journey is the sole reliable connection. The cost of communications, the lack of a deep-water port and the few air connections all stand in the way of external links, even with neighbouring African states.

The islands were 'discovered' by the Portuguese in 1470 and remained under colonial rule until independence in 1975. In colonial days, São Tomé and Príncipe's existence revolved around a plantation-based economy that relied on the repression of workers, harsh living conditions and very low levels of education and healthcare. Independence was ill-prepared for. The 2,000 Portuguese residents simply fled, leaving behind a costly infrastructure, an economy reliant upon the precarious international cocoa market and a dearth of locals with technical or managerial training.

Despite this, the new government, led by President Pinto da Costa, initially delivered on its promises of improving the quality of life for Santomeans. Literacy levels rose from less than 20 per cent at independence to 57 per cent in 1981 and an impressive 73 per cent in 1991. There were also dramatic improvements in health and education.

Problems, however, were just around the corner. In the 1980s the cocoa price began to crash and serious borrowing was necessary to subsidize the quasi-Marxist government programme. The situation was unsustainable and the country moved towards democratic elections and a free-market economy. The first multi-party elections were held in 1991, and the transition to democracy was peaceful.

The country's foreign debt mounted fast in this period as export revenues fell and import needs remained high. Today, the country has the heaviest debt burden in the world relative to the size of its economy and to its foreign-exchange earnings. Per-capita income has plummeted from $714 in 1994 to $438 in 1997. The struggle now is to find a way of protecting the education and health achievements while steering the economy away from its long-standing and ultimately debilitating dependence on cocoa.

Agrarian reform in 1993 redistributed land to small-scale farmers. In a country that enjoys lush fertility, this has encouraged both food self-sufficiency and crop diversification. Plans to set up a Free Trade Zone are under way, and the Government is carefully trying to unpick its isolation and find a positive role for the islands in the new international order. Since 1998 it has curbed inflation, stabilized the exchange rate, and made real headway in balancing the country's budget. This will strengthen the Government's bid for international debt relief. There are also oil reserves which US and French companies are investigating.

What remains to be seen is how ordinary Santomeans might benefit from such opportunities – and be protected from the undoubted risks. ■

Zelda Fazaeli

AT A GLANCE

FELA ADEBIYI

Leader President Miguel Trovoada; Prime Minister Dr Posser da Costa.

Economy GNP per capita $438 (Gabon $3,950, Portugal $10,160).
Monetary unit: Dobra (Db).
Main exports: cocoa (88%), coffee, bananas.
External debt: $267.3 million or $2,036 per person. The total external debt stood at 465% of GDP in 1997 and servicing that debt took up 72% of export earnings.

People 132,678.

Health Infant mortality 61 per 1,000 live births (Gabon 85, Portugal 7). Maternal mortality 131 per 100,000 births. Health conditions have deteriorated since the economic problems of the late 1980s.

Environment Boasts the second most important primary rainforest in Africa. The main problem is construction workers taking sand from the beaches.

Culture The population comprises: Angolares, reportedly descended from survivors of a slave ship wrecked in the 1540s; Forros, descendants of the first Portuguese settlers and freed slaves; Serviçais, contract labourers from Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique; and Tongas, descendants of Serviçais.
Religion: Mainly Catholic though other churches and Islam now more prevalent. Traditional beliefs also still strong.
Language: 99.8% of the population speak Portuguese and 73.5% speak lungwa Santomé, the main creole dialect.

***Sources** United Nations System Common Country Assessment 1998; National Human Development Report 1998; The State of the World's Children 1999.*

Never previously profiled

NI star rating	
EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★
Land reform benefited those most at risk of poverty, but economic problems continue to take their toll on vulnerable groups.

LITERACY ★★★
The most recent figure is 73% but levels of literacy may be slipping thanks to recent budget cuts.

FREEDOM ★★★★
Democracy remains strong with a healthy proportion of people voting and, in general, the judiciary has a good reputation.

SELF-RELIANCE ★★
Despite the fertile land, 20% of food is still imported as cocoa production continues to dominate.

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★
64 years. Compares with an average for sub-Saharan Africa of 51 years and 75 years in the former colonial power, Portugal.

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★
The constitution prohibits sex discrimination but women are far more likely to suffer from poverty.

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★ Since its inception, the democratic political structure has been plagued by inter-party rivalry in the Congress. But the 1998 elections gave the social democratic party MLSTP an absolute congressional majority. Most people expect independence leader Pinto da Costa to return to power in the next Presidential election in 2001.

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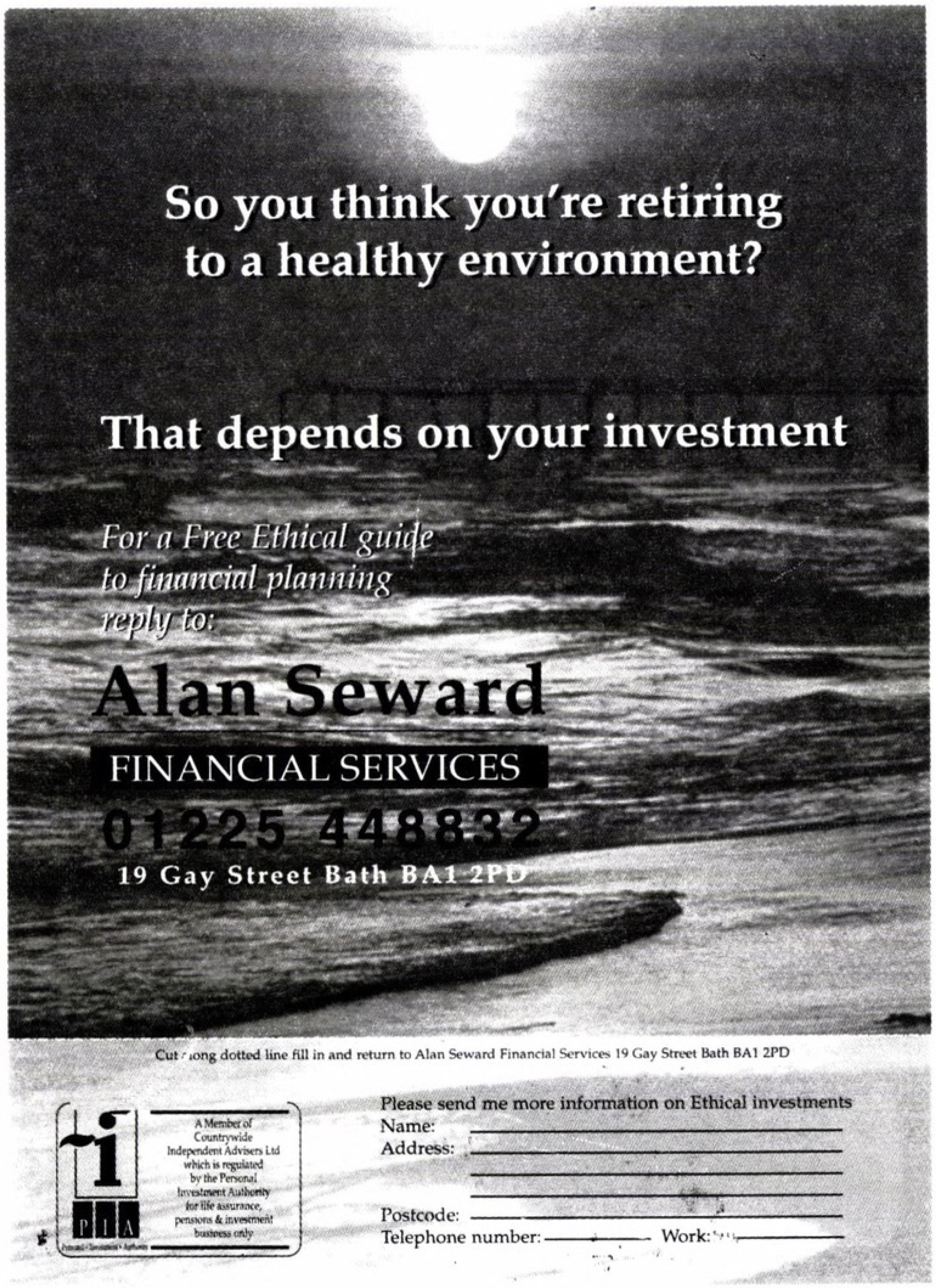
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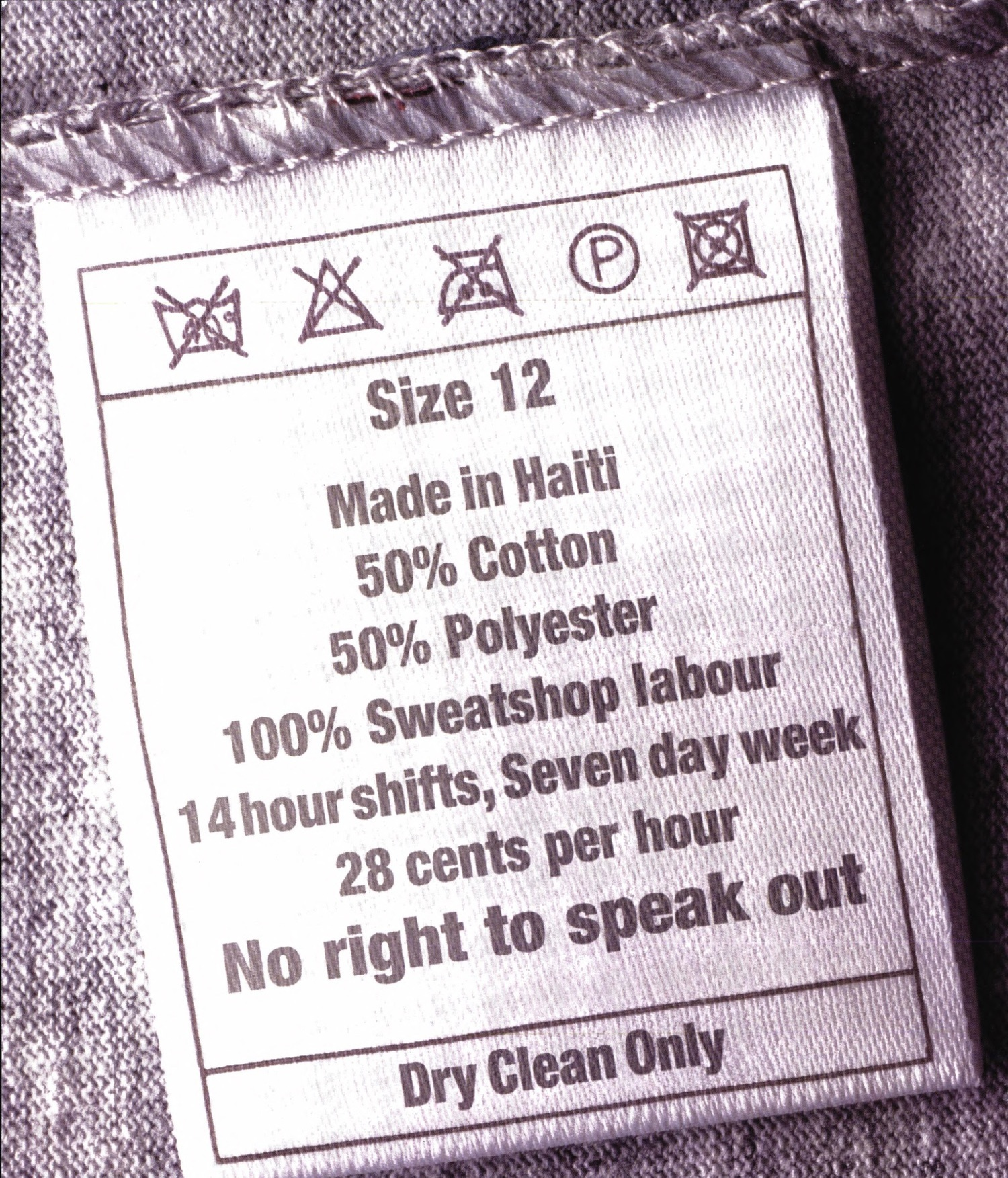
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